

The
FRENCH
ARMY
from within
by "Ex Trooper"





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BY
"EX-TROOPER"

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CHAPTER I

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FRENCH ARMY

BEFORE proceeding to the consideration of life as lived in the French Army, it would be well to have a clear understanding of the constitution of the Army of France, the parts of which it is composed, and the conditions under which it is organised and controlled. The British Army is a growth of years, and even of centuries, but with the changes of government that France has undergone since 1815 the constitution of the Army has undergone radical changes, and the French Army of to-day dates back only to 1871—that is, as far as form and composition are in question.

One of the principles under which the present Republic of France is constituted is that “every citizen is a soldier.” This principle has been more and more enforced with the growth and consolidation of the Republic since 1870, and successive laws passed with reference to the Army have been

framed with ever-increasing recognition of the need for military efficiency. By the first law with regard to the constitution of the Army, that of July 27th, 1872, every young man, at the age of twenty, so long as he was physically fit, owed to his country five years of active service, five years in the Territorial Army of France, and six years in what was known as the Territorial reserve. On this law the constitution and organisation of the Army were first based.

The law of July 15th, 1889, reduced the period of service to three years in the active Army, but the principle remained the same. A further modification in the length of service was brought about by the law of 1905, which reduced the period of service with the active Army to two years, and abolished certain classes of citizens who were excused from military service for various reasons. Up to the passing of this law, bread-winners of a family had been exempt, but by it they were called on to serve, while the state pensioned their dependents during their period of service; the "voluntariat," consisting of men who paid a certain amount to the state in order to serve for a period of one year only, was abolished—"every citizen a soldier" was made more of a reality than ever, for the nation realised that it must keep pace with the

neighbour on the east, who was steadily increasing its military resources.

From the age of twenty to that of forty-five, every Frenchman physically capable of military service is a soldier. Each commune complies yearly a list of its young men who have attained the age of twenty during the preceding twelve months. All these young men are examined by the *conseil de révision cantonale*, a revising body of military and civilian officials, by whom the men not physically fit are at once rejected, and men who may possibly attain to the standard of fitness required are put back for examination after a sufficient interval has elapsed to admit of their development in height, weight, or other requirement in which they are deficient. Five feet and half an inch is the minimum standard of height, though men of exceptional physical quality are passed into the infantry below this height.

The *loi des cadres* of 1907 supplemented the law of 1905 without materially changing it. At the present time about 200,000 men are enrolled every year, this number including the men who have been put back from previous examination by the revising council. The active Army of France thus consists of about 535,000 men, together with an approximate total of 55,000 men serving in

Algeria and 20,000 men serving in Tunis. The gendarmerie and Republican guard add on another 25,000, and the colonial troops serving in the French colonies amount to a total of about 60,000. This last number is steadily increasing by means of the enrolment of natives of the French colonies in Africa.

These numbers concern the Army on a peace footing. In case of a national emergency the total war strength of the French Army is calculated at 4,800,000. Of these 1,350,000 comprise the first line troops made up of the active Army and younger classes of the reserve, who would constitute the first field armies to engage the enemy on an outbreak of war. The remainder of the total of nearly 5 millions would be called up as required for garrison purposes and to strengthen the ranks of the field army.

The citizen is still expected to give twenty-five years of service to his country; of these, two—or rather three, under the law passed by the action of the war ministry of M. Viviani just before the outbreak of the present continental war—years are expected to be spent in the active Army, and another eleven in the reserve of the active Army. During this second period of eleven years men are recalled to the colours—that is, to service with the

active Army—for periods of a month at a time. At the conclusion of this first thirteen years of service, men pass automatically to the Territorial Army, which is supposed to serve for the purposes of home defence only. Service in the Territorial Army lasts six years, after which the soldier passes to six years in the reserve of the Territorial Army. After this the French citizen is exempt from any further military obligation.

Registered at the age of twenty, the French citizen is called to the colours on the first of October following his registration, and passes from the active Army two years later on September 30th. In old days, when the period of service in the active Army was for five years, the French Army was an unpopular institution, but the shortening of service together with the knowledge, possessed by the nation as a whole, that the need for every citizen soldier would eventually rise through the action of Germany, have combined to render the Army not only an important item in national life, but a popular one. There used to be grouchers and bad characters by the score, but now they are rarely found.

In time of peace the active Army of France is so organised as to form the skeleton on which to build the war forces of the Republic. The system

is one of twenty permanent Army Corps based as follows: the first at Lille, the second at Amiens, the third at Rouen, the fourth at Le Mans, the fifth at Orléans, the sixth at Châlons-sur-Marne, the seventh at Besançon, the eighth at Bourges, the ninth at Tours, the tenth at Rennes, the eleventh at Nantes, the twelfth at Limoges, the thirteenth at Clermont-Ferrand, the fourteenth at Lyons, the fifteenth at Marseilles, the sixteenth at Montpellier, the seventeenth at Toulouse, the eighteenth at Bordeaux, the nineteenth at Algiers, and the twentieth at Nancy.

The strength of an Army Corps is made up of two divisions of infantry, a brigade of cavalry, a brigade of horse and field artillery, and one "squadron of train," the last named including the non-combatants of the Army Corps. Exceptions are the Sixth Army Corps with head-quarters at Châlons, the seventh at Besançon, and the nineteenth at Algiers; of these the first mentioned two contain three divisions of infantry instead of two, while the Algerian Corps has four divisions, one of which is detached for duty in Tunis.

In addition to the twenty stations of the Army Corps, eight independent cavalry divisions have head-quarters respectively at Paris, Luneville, Meaux, Sedan, Melun, Lyons, Rheims, and Dôle.

There is also the military government of Paris, which, acting independently of the rest, contains detachments from four Army Corps and two cavalry divisions. A cavalry division is made up of two brigades, each consisting of two regiments which in turn contain four squadrons and a reserve squadron of peace.

The infantry of the French Army consists of 163 regiments of infantry of the line, 31 battalions of Chasseurs à Pied, mainly stationed in mountain districts, 4 regiments of Zouaves, 4 regiments of Turcos or native Algerian tirailleurs, 2 regiments of the Foreign Legion, 5 disciplinary battalions known as African Light Infantry.

The cavalry organisation is 12 regiments of Cuirassiers, 32 regiments of Dragoons, 21 regiments of Chasseurs—corresponding to the British Lancers—14 regiments of Hussars, 6 regiments of Chasseurs d'Afrique, and 4 regiments of native Algerian Cavalry known as Spahis.

The French Army is rather weak in artillery, its total strength consisting of 445 field batteries organised into 40 regiments of field artillery; 52 batteries of horse artillery, the greater part of which, however, have been transformed or are in process of transformation to field batteries; 14 mountain batteries; 18 battalions of garrison artillery, to-

gether with artificers to a total of 13 companies. Six regiments of engineers are divided into 22 battalions, and there is also a department of engineers known as the railway regiment. The non-combatant branches of the Army are formed into 20 squadrons of train, which contain the equivalents to the British Army Service Corps, Army Ordnance Corps, and the *personnel* of units connected with the upkeep and maintenance of the Army in the field. In addition, there is an Army Corps of colonial infantry, service in which is a voluntary matter. Its strength is about 30,000 troops in France and over 60,000 distributed throughout the various colonies.

The officers of the French Army receive their training at military schools established in various parts of the Republic, or else are recruited from among non-commissioned officers. Not less than one-third of the total number of French officers rise to commissions by the latter method—Napoleon's remark about the marshal's bâton in the private soldier's knapsack still holds good in the French Army. The principal training schools are those of St. Cyr for infantry and cavalry officers, the École Polytechnique for artillery and engineer officers, and the musketry school at Châlons. The schools of St. Maixent, Saumur, Versailles, and

the gymnastic school at Joinville-le-Pont are intended for the training of non-commissioned officers selected for commissions.

The rate of pay for men in the first period of service is very low, ranging from the equivalent of a halfpenny a day upwards; but the law under which the Army is constituted provides for the re-enlistment of such men as wish to make a career of the Army, and on re-enlistment the rate of pay is materially increased, while a bounty is given on re-engagement, and at the conclusion of a certain amount of service re-engaged men are granted pensions. It is only reasonable that, with the adoption of the principle of universal service, the rate of pay should be low; voluntary re-enlistment, however, is a different matter, so the Republic rewards the men who re-engage at the conclusion of their first term. From among them are selected practically all the non-commissioned officers, while, considering that all necessities of life are provided for them in addition to their pay, even the rank and file are not badly off.

The armament of the French infantry is the Lebel rifle with bayonet, this pattern of rifle having been adopted in 1886. It is understood that an automatic rifle is under consideration, but a serious drawback to the use of such a weapon is the fact

that, with a rate of fire three or four times as great as that of the ordinary magazine rifle with bolt action, the automatic rifle would require more ammunition than its user could carry. The weapon of the Field Artillery is a shielded quick-firing gun of Creusot pattern, with a bore of 75 millimetres. On this gun the field-guns of all nations have been modelled, but, although it was the first of its kind to be put into use, it still gives the artillery of the French Army a decided advantage over that of other Continental nations, when reckoned gun for gun. The French cavalry is armed with a straight sword, in place of the old-fashioned curved blade which the French discarded some time ago, but which remained in use in the British Army up to the end of 1907. A carbine and bamboo lance are also carried.

In all matters of military equipment and armament the French Republic has led the world since its reconstitution after 1870. The Lebel rifle and its adoption inaugurated a new era in the armament of infantry; the 75-millimetre gun, as already noted, was the first of its kind to come into use. The Lebel carbine which the cavalry carry is still unsurpassed as a cavalry weapon. Further, France led the world in the development of air craft; the lighter-than-air machine, certainly, has developed

into a German specialty, but the heavier-than-air machine, or aeroplane, owes its development to French enterprise, and very largely to French military enterprise. In all branches of the service, and in all matters affecting the service, the French Army is the home of experiment, and to this fact is due the greater part of French military efficiency to-day. The bravery of French troops is unquestioned, and, in addition to this, the French Army has nothing to learn from the armies of other nations as regards *matériel* and equipment.

CHAPTER II

THE FRENCH SOLDIER AT HOME

BRITISH soldiers, serving under a voluntary system, have little to say for the conscript system, but a glance round Paris in time of peace might persuade them that there are various compensations and advantages in a conscript army which they, serving voluntarily, do not enjoy. It is a surprise to one who has served in the British Army to see the French Republican Guards stationed on the grand staircase of the Opéra, and also at all entrances and exits of this famous building. In practically every theatrical establishment in Paris the Guards may be seen on this class of duty, for which they get specially paid. There are military attendants at the Folies Bergères, at the Nouveau Cirque, at the Moulin Rouge, and even at such an irresponsible home of laughter as the Bal Tabarin. As the darkey said of Daniel in the lions' den, these men get a free show.

But it is not only when on duty that the French soldier is to be seen in such places of amusement

as these, for the non-commissioned officer is to be found in company with his wife or *fiancée* in every class of seat. It is no uncommon thing to find among the most attentive listeners at the Opéra a number of *piou-pioux*, in full uniform, among the fashionable people in the stalls. The Republican rule, which makes of every man a citizen and an equal of all the rest, leads to what, in such a country as England, would be considered curious anomalies. Beside the newspaper critic in full evening-dress may be seen the private soldier, in uniform, taking notes with probably greater intelligence than the newspaper man; for the soldier may be anything in civilian life: the son of the rich banker occupies the next bed in the barrack-room to the son of the Breton peasant, and the Cabinet Minister's lad, when in uniform, is on a level with the gamin of Paris.

It must be confessed that the average French soldier, when off parade, looks rather slovenly. The baggy trousers go a long way toward the creation of this impression. Then, again, the way in which the French soldier is trained to march is far different from British principles. The "pas-de-flexion" does not look so smart as the stately march of the British Guards, but it is more effective. This bent-knee, slouching method carries men

along with a swing; the step is shorter than that of British troops, but the rate is more to the minute than that of the British Army, and the men swing along, to all appearances tireless, at such a pace that they cover about thirty miles a day on manoeuvres. This, too, with a pack at which a British infantryman would look aghast, for the French pack is proverbial for its size and weight. It confers a great advantage, however, with regard to marching, in that it lessens the amount of transport which must follow on the track of infantry, and is necessary to the well-being of the men.

A British infantry regiment on the march, and marching at ease, still looks imposing; a French infantry battalion, on the other hand, is the reverse of spectacular when marching at ease. The band comes first, with its instruments carried anyhow so long as they are comfortable; the rank and file, following, carry their rifles as the band carries its instruments, in any fantastic position that makes for ease; step is not maintained; the set "fours" which British troops maintain at ease as well as at attention are not to be seen, for a man drops back to the rank in his rear to talk to a comrade, or goes forward to the rank in front to light his cigarette. They smoke and sing and joke; they eat bread and drink wine by way of refreshment, since

the evening meal is yet a long way off; alongside the troops as they march may be seen pedlars and hawkers offering their wares, and it is all quite the usual thing, quite legitimate. The fetish of smartness is non-existent here; comfort and use are the main points.

But, at the given occasion, comes the word from the colonel; correct formations appear out of the threes and fives of men as if by magic. The band is a corporate body, marching to attention, and playing the regiment on with every bit as fine a military appearance as any British band. The men resume step, and, with their peculiar swinging march, follow on, a regiment at attention, and as fine a regiment, in appearance as well as in fact, as one would wish to see. Work is work, and play is play, and the French soldier does both thoroughly.

This attitude of the French soldier toward his work, and the fact that he is permitted to maintain that attitude, are due to so large a proportion of the officers having themselves served in the ranks. There is a sufficient leavening of "ranker" officers to enable all commissioned men to understand, when on a route march, what it feels like to the rank and file. Unlike the British Army, that of France is a Republican business. The very circumstance that discipline is more severe arises

from the fact that all men are equal, and both soldier and officer know it. And, if ever the French soldier becomes conscious that he is really suffering from the severity of discipline, he knows that he is suffering in good company: under conscription there is no escape.

The training of the French *piou-piou* in marching is a scientific business. At first he is required to execute 160 steps to the minute—very short steps taken very quickly. In this way the recruit is made to cover 3000 yards at first, and then the distance is increased to 12,000 yards, the increases being made a thousand yards at a time. As the distance increases, the length of the step is increased, and the number of steps to the minute decreased. The full course of training is reckoned at three practices a week for three months, and the infantry recruit, before being dismissed from training, is required to cover twelve miles at the rate of seven miles an hour. There is no doubt that this scientific training in marching, and the teaching of the half-shuffling trot, characteristic of French infantry, add enormously to the marching value of the men. One battalion of Chasseurs-à-Pied set up a record in marching while on manœuvres by covering no less than 68 kilometres (equivalent to nearly 40 English miles) in the course of a day. This

constitutes a definite record in marching, for any considerable body of men.

In the matter of smartness, it is hardly fair to compare a British infantry battalion with a French one, for the point arises yet once more with regard to the difference between a voluntary and a conscript system. The English battalion is made up of picked men, while in the French service all citizens are included; the fact of choice in the case of the British battalion makes for uniformity. The recruits of the French battalion include every man who has been passed by the revising board, and there is not the same chance of maintaining that uniformity which alone is responsible for smartness. And smartness itself is but a survival from the days when a soldier was trained to no more than unquestioning obedience, the old days before warfare became so scientific as it is at present, when initiative was not required of the rank and file. The only purpose served by smartness at the present day is that of recruiting, and, obviously, a conscript army has no need of this. Hence use rather than appearance comes first.

An island people may well wonder that a conscript army could be so popular as is the French, but then an island people could never realise, although they might vaguely understand, what it

must be like to know that some day the army of a hostile nation may march across the frontier. The absence of sea bulwarks makes a difference in the temper of a people; an ever-present threat colours and modifies their life, and, no matter how set for peace the conditions may appear, the threat is present just the same. Since 1872 France as a whole has known that the day of reckoning with Germany would come, and the knowledge has grown more complete and more insistent with the passing of each year and the increase in German military preparations, which could be destined to fulfil but one end. France realised its duty to combat the fulfilment of that end, and the nation as a whole set itself to prepare against "The Day."

By reason of this the French Army is popular; the discipline is severe, far too much so for any English soldier to endure as a Frenchman endures it; punishments are frequent, it is true, but they are undergone in the right spirit by the great majority, who know that the Army must be trained and kept in ultimate efficiency. The conscript knows that his training is a part of the price that the nation must pay for having a land frontier and a grasping neighbour, and he pays his part of the price cheerfully and well. It may be said

that no conscript army in Europe is so popular as that of France; in none is there a better spirit than that displayed by Frenchmen. The mercurial temperament of the nation is yet another cause for severe disciplinary measures, for in order to shape a Frenchman to military requirements his extreme elasticity must be controlled, and this would be impossible under such conditions as are sufficient for the maintenance of, say, the British Army.

Moreover, Republican rule and French military methods have forged bonds between officers and men which never have existed and never will exist in the army of their great opponent, for instance. I have devoted a considerable section of a chapter to punishment, and possibly at first sight this list may appear severe. It is, however, only necessary to recall the fact that while Germany takes only a percentage of its men for military training, and France takes the whole for the same purpose, German methods are twice as severe. Yet again, it is not the quality of the punishment inflicted, but the spirit in which it is inflicted that counts most. The French soldier admires, respects, and will gladly obey the colonel or captain who writes him down so many days *salle de police* when he deserves it. But the German soldier is hardly likely to respect

the officer who not only inflicts punishments according to scale, but will lash him across the face with a whip until the blood flows. Between French officers and their men is the spirit of comradeship, and in this is evidence of the value of the French method of training. Between the German officer and the man whom he commands are hate and despite in the great majority of cases, and this also attests the value of a system.

CHAPTER III

THE HIGHER RANKS

SO far as the rank and file of the French Army are concerned, no officer above the rank of colonel is of consequence, for the man in the ranks is not likely to come in contact with a general officer once in a twelvemonth. The colonel is the head of the regiment, whether of artillery, cavalry, or infantry, and his authority extends in every direction over the men he commands. With the help of the Conseil d'Administration he directs the administration of his regiment, and he is responsible for discipline and instruction, all forms of military education, sanitation, and police control, while, needless to say, he is held responsible for the efficiency of the regiment and the appearance of its men. He has absolute power as regards the appointment of all non-commissioned officers and corporals, who, in the French Army, do not rank as non-commissioned officers.

Corresponding very nearly with the "second-in-command" common to British units, the lieutenant-

colonel of a French regiment acts on behalf of the colonel, and is the intermediary of the latter in every branch of the service. In the absence of the colonel the lieutenant-colonel is empowered to issue orders in his name, and he is also especially charged with the discipline and conduct of the officers of the regiment. He keeps the report books concerning the officers, and is responsible for the entering up of reports as regards their military and private conduct and their efficiency. The colonel, however, countersigns the reports, adding whatever notes he may think desirable.

The French equivalent of the major of English cavalry is the Chef d'Escadron, of whom there are two to each regiment, each in command of two service squadrons. One is specially appointed to presidency over the Commission des Ordinaires or arrangements for the food supply of the regiment, while the other presides over the Commission d'Abattage, which, in addition to the actual killing of horses, when such a step is necessary, is concerned with arrangements for forage and all matters connected with equine supplies. Each of the Chefs d'Escadron is responsible for the culinary arrangements of his two squadrons, and the management of canteens is also under his supervision. The two chefs are in charge of the barrack police

and transmit their orders with regard to this duty through a captain and an adjutant.

The officer known in the British service as quartermaster is termed major in the French Army, but the French major has more definite authority than the British quartermaster. Under his charge are placed the regulation of pay and accounts, the making of purchases, the supervision of equipment and barrack furniture, etc. The French major, in addition to these head-quarters duties which concern the well-being of the whole regiment, has definite command of the fifth squadron, which forms the depot for the regiment in case of war.

From the major the Capitaine Trésorier receives the pay and monies which have to be distributed to the regiment. He is a member of the Conseil d'Administration, from which he receives his authorisation to make payment. The pay of the men is handed to them every fifth day, when the Capitaine Trésorier or paymaster hands over to the sergeant-major of each squadron, or to the captain commanding, the pay of the squadron for distribution among the men. He also makes all payments and issues demands for supplies for the horses of the regiment, and a lieutenant or sub-lieutenant is appointed to assist the paymaster in his duties.

The Capitaine d'Habillemeut is the head of the regimental workshops of every description; he is held responsible for the well-being of the armoury, clothing stores, and barrack furniture, of which establishments he keeps the accounts. He has in addition to superintend all the regimental workshops, including those of the tailor, boot-maker, saddler, etc. His assistant is a lieutenant known as the Porte Étendard, who carries the colours of the regiment on parade—for in French armies the colours are still carried on parade and into action, unlike the rule of the British Army, which has abandoned the carrying of colours into action for many years.

The Capitaine-Instructeur is deputed to attend to the instruction of the non-commissioned officers of the regiment, and is held responsible for their efficiency in matters of drill and discipline. He also lectures junior officers on their duties with regard to drill, shooting, veterinary matters, topography, etc., and he is specially responsible that the adjutants of the regiment perform their duties properly.

Of officers of the rank of captain, two are appointed to each squadron, the senior being the Capitaine Commandant and the junior the Capitaine en second, or junior captain. The senior cap-

tain is in charge of the squadron, which in peace time has a strength of about 120 officers and men, but for active service has its strength raised considerably. He is responsible for the military education of his squadron, for the discipline of the rank and file, and the condition of the horses and stables, and he is also responsible for the pay and supplies of the squadron handed over to him by the paymaster and others. He has control of the promotion of non-commissioned officers and the leave granted to non-commissioned officers and men. He is responsible to the Chef d'Escadron for the efficient performance of his duties.

The second captain of each squadron is, as regards squadron duties, under the orders of the captain commanding, and is especially concerned with all matters affecting food supplies. In addition to his squadron duties, he has to take his turn every fifth week as "captain of the week," when he has to supervise roll calls and assemblies, and the mounting and dismounting of guards. As captain of the week he supervises the cleanliness and security of the barracks and the work of the police.

Of lieutenants and sub-lieutenants, four are appointed to each squadron, each being responsible for a *peloton* or troop of men. Responsible to the senior captain of the squadron for the performance

of his duties, the lieutenant is expected to instruct his men at drill, supervise their work in stables, and see that their barrack rooms are properly kept. The lieutenant is empowered to hold such inspections of kit and clothes as he may think necessary.

To every regiment two doctors are appointed, holding the ranks of captain and lieutenant respectively. Each regiment of cavalry and artillery is also provided with two veterinary surgeons. As the duties of these officers are of a non-combatant nature, they are not materially concerned with the discipline or military efficiency of the regiment to which they are attached.

Corresponding to the warrant-officer of the British Army and standing as intermediary between officers and non-commissioned officers of the French Army, the adjudants are appointed in the number of three to a regiment. Two of these known simply as adjudants have different duties from the third, to whom is given the title of Adjudant Vaguemestre. The two adjudants assist the work of the captain-instructor in immediately superintending the efficiency of non-commissioned officers. All sergeants and corporals are subject to their authority, and, in alternate weeks, each takes turn as "adjudant of the week" under the captain of the week. In this orderly duty the adjudant of the week keeps the

rolls of sergeants and corporals, and arranges their turns of duty. He keeps the register of punishments of non-commissioned officers and the rank and file, and is responsible for the sounding of all regimental calls; he transmits the orders of the colonel to the sergeant-majors of the squadrons, and inspects the morning roll-call of each squadron. He attends to the closing of canteens and sees that "lights out" is obeyed in the barrack rooms. The position of adjutant in the French Army is one of considerable authority, which, to the credit of the service be it said, is seldom abused. The Adjutant Vaguemestre is but a minor official by comparison with the other two. He is generally a non-commissioned officer who has nearly finished his period of service, and he acts as regimental postman and postmaster, being, on the whole, a sort of handy man for all matters of business in which responsibility is incurred.

The sergeant-major of each squadron has almost as much authority as the adjutant. He is, among the non-commissioned officers, what the senior captain is among commissioned officers; he stands as right-hand man to the senior captain, and, in constant contact with the non-commissioned officers and men of the squadron, is able very largely to influence the judgment of the captain with regard

to the rank and file. He gives all the captain's orders to the squadron with regard to instruction, discipline, dress, etc. He is responsible for the keeping of books and registers, and for this work has appointed to him as assistants a sergeant *fourrier* and corporal *fourrier*. He is in charge of the squadron stores and of all the *matériel* of the squadron.

The sergeants are appointed in the number of one to a troop, and are held responsible for the efficiency of the corporals and troopers. They take turns as "sergeant of the week" for their squadrons, a duty corresponding to that of the orderly-sergeant in the British Army. Nominally, the sergeant of each troop is responsible to the lieutenant or sub-lieutenant of the troop, but in reality the sergeant is more under control of the squadron sergeant-major, and, through him, of the captain. The sergeant drills the men of his troop; he is responsible that the troop barrack room is properly kept; that kits and clothing are kept clean and complete; that arms and saddlery, also, are kept in order. As sergeant of the week, the sergeant inspects and reports to the sergeant-major the correctness of morning and evening roll-call; he keeps the roll of fatigue men, and also of men in the squadron for guard; he parades the sick for inspection by the

doctor and also parades all men for fatigues and guards. The sergeant *fourrier* holding the rank of sergeant is more of the nature of squadron clerk, as his duties, with the exception of escorting men sent to hospital, consist mainly in keeping books and accounts, in which he has the corporal *fourrier* to help him.

The corporal of the French Army is placed in charge of a squad of about ten men; he sleeps in the same room with them, is responsible for their personal cleanliness and the arrangement of their kits, and sees that any men of his squad for guard or special duty turn out correctly. He superintends the general cleaning of kit which the captain orders weekly, and a rather curious duty which falls to his lot is to see that the troopers of his squad change their linen once a week. This, however, is not so curious as may appear at first sight, for it must be borne in mind that the French Army sweeps up every class of citizen into its net, and with some of the men personal cleanliness is so little a habit that insistence on the point by one in authority is a necessity.

In addition to these intimate matters the French corporal has to superintend the drill of recruits, teach them to arrange their kit and packs, and show them methods of cleaning arms and kit, and

grooming horses. He is empowered to inflict minor punishments which he must report to the sergeant in charge of the troop. The corporal is responsible for the maintenance of order in the barrack room, for the proper serving of meals, and the compliance with the order for "lights out"; he takes turn as corporal of the week with his fellows, and in that capacity is deputy for and assistant to the sergeant of the week. Altogether, the corporal of the French Army has a very busy time, and in addition to this his position is not so secure as that of the British corporal; the latter's rank counts as a definite promotion, while the rank of the French corporal is only an appointment, and he may find himself "reduced" much more quickly than the British man in an equivalent position.

The conscript system, leading to a number of unwilling soldiers, is much more provocative of punishments than the voluntary system. In the latter, all men who enlist get the habit of making the best of their service; they have joined the army of their own free will, and have only themselves to blame if they do not like it. In a conscript army, however, there are many who hate the limitations imposed on them by service in time of peace, and enter only with a view to getting the business over and getting back to their former

positions in life; it is a disagreeable necessity, the period of military service, and they are there to do as little as possible, without any regard to the welfare of the country, though a national emergency like the present finds every man willing to do his part. Not that such an attitude is the rule in time of peace, but, especially among the very lowest classes, it is not unusual. Since it is impossible to make sheep and goats of the men, but all must be treated alike, discipline is much more rigid and severe than in the British Army—which is the only voluntary European army from which comparisons can be drawn. The view is taken—necessarily taken—that men must be compelled to do their work and learn their lessons of drill and shooting; for those who give trouble in any way, there is the *salle de police*, or guard-room, the prison for worse offences, and, for hardened offenders, there is service in the dreaded disciplinary battalions of Algeria. This last form of punishment is resorted to only in the case of men who have “committed one or several faults, the gravity of which makes any other mode of repression inadequate.”

Contrary to the rule of the British Army, in which only commanding and company or squadron officers are empowered to inflict punishment, in the French Army any man can be punished by any

other man holding a rank superior to his own, under all circumstances that may arise. As an instance: if a private of a British regiment insulted a corporal of another regiment, the case would be reported to the man's own commanding officer, who in due time would investigate the case and inflict the requisite punishment for the offence; in the French Army, if a private were guilty of a similar offence, the injured corporal would be at liberty to inflict the punishment on his own account; his action would have to be confirmed by a superior officer, but, under the rules governing the administration of punishment, there would be no difficulty about that.

The officer in command of a regiment has power to increase, diminish, or even cancel punishments inflicted by inferior officers, and the captain in charge of a squadron has a like power over the subordinate officers directly under his command and over the punishments they may inflict.

This system of giving so much power to all has more against it than in its favour. Certainly, given a just junior officer or non-commissioned officer, he is more likely to inflict a punishment that fits the crime than the commanding officer to whom he may report the case—he knows all the circumstances better than the man to whom he may tell

them, and, in direct contact with the offender at the time the offence was committed, is not so likely to err on the side of undue severity or that of undue leniency—and that is about all that can be said in favour of the system. Against it must be said that it places in the hands of very many men, of all ranks and grades, a tremendous power which may easily be abused; under such a system a sergeant or corporal who has a grudge against a particular man can make that man's life a perfect misery to him, and, since in a conscript army authority must be upheld at all costs, even more than in a volunteer army, the right of complaint which belongs to the man is not often of much use to them—discipline would be impaired if officers upheld their men against their non-commissioned officers.

Further, officers are more liable to punishment in the French Army than in the British. In the latter force, a court-martial on an officer is a very rare thing, but in the French service the equivalent to a court-martial is not an infrequent occurrence, and a certain percentage of officers get "confined to room," "confined to fortress," suspended from duty for varying periods, and cashiered (dismissed from the service),—these things happening with considerably greater frequency than in the British Army. It must be said, on the other hand, that

the French officer has more required of him in time of peace than the British officer; he is required to be in closer contact with his men, and to undertake more arduous duties, and, on the whole, French officers are keen soldiers, intent on the performance of their duties, taking themselves and their work very seriously. The lesson of Metz in 1870 has not been wasted on the modern French Army, and the knowledge that some day the nation would again take up arms against its eastern neighbour has led to a strict maintenance of efficiency on the part of the officers of the Army, and to a keenness quite equal to that shown in a voluntary force.

Non-commissioned officers are subject to punishments of a more severe nature than those inflicted on their fellows in the British Army—the constant comparison between the two, in matters of discipline, is necessary in order to give a clear idea of conditions of service for all ranks of the French Army. The British non-commissioned officer is either reprimanded or reduced to the ranks; the French non-commissioned officer may be confined to barracks after evening roll-call, confined to his room for slight breaches of discipline, or sent to prison and still retain his rank on his release, a thing impossible in the British service. Only for

repeated misdemeanours are non-commissioned officers reduced to the ranks, while one offence is sufficient to ensure this punishment in the British service. Privates are punished in various ways according to the nature of the offence committed. The lightest punishment of all consists of extra fatigue duty; next in order comes inspection on guard parade, the man in question being compelled to parade with the guard in full marching order for a definite number of times; confinement to barracks for a stated period is inflicted for still more serious but still light offences; being sent to the *salle de police* is a considerably severer form of punishment, and consists in the offenders being kept at night in the guard-room, doing ordinary duty during the day, and, in addition, doing all sorts of fatigues and making themselves scavengers for the regiment. Prison and solitary confinement in cells are two forms of punishment allotted to really bad characters, on whom the previously named forms of punishment have not sufficient effect. Finally, there are the Algerian disciplinary battalions, and the man who is sent to one of these may be reckoned as a criminal, as a rule. It is a curious fact that reading a newspaper constitutes an offence against discipline in the French Army,

and no newspapers are permitted to be brought into barracks.

The list of officers given in this chapter has been taken from the staff of a French cavalry regiment, but it applies almost identically to artillery units, while, in the case of infantry units, it is necessary only to delete all that refers to the care of horses, and the staff of officers and non-commissioned officers is practically the same as in the cavalry. The French "regiment" of artillery is a similar unit of strength to that of most great continental armies, though it has no equivalent in the British service, where the artillery is grouped in units known as brigades, of not much more than half the strength of the continental regiment. The French cavalry regiment also is considerably stronger than the British cavalry unit, containing five squadrons to the latter's four. This brings the cavalry regiment of the French Army nearly up to the strength of the infantry unit.

The matter of punishments has been dwelt on at some length, owing to the prominence given to punishment in the French Army. Made up as it is of every class, the members of which are compelled to serve whether they like it or no, punishment is a necessity, and a frequent one at that, in the case of all ranks. It does not, however, alter the fact

that the great majority of French conscripts are keen and willing soldiers, who make the best of their service and give a good account of themselves.

CHAPTER IV

INFANTRY

SINCE the training of the French soldier lasts but two years, it is of little use making a distinction between recruits and others, for two years is a very brief period into which to compress all that a soldier must learn in order to become efficient. It may be noted that, in the British service, three years is considered the shortest period in which an infantry soldier can be turned out as fully efficient. Again, it must always be borne in mind, in considering the French Army, that *all* must be taught their work. There is as great a percentage of stupid people in France as in any other country; a voluntary army is at liberty to reject fools as undesirable, but the nation with a conscript system must train the fools as well as the wise ones, for, admitting the principle that strength consists in numbers of trained men, then every rifle counts so long as its holder is capable of firing.

The conscript, coming to the colours on the first of October, is usually given the choice of the arm

of service in which he will do his two years' training. The subject of this chapter has elected to serve in the infantry of the line. He may have just completed an expensive education, or he may have come from Montmartre, the slums of a provincial town, the *landes* of Brittany, or a village of French Lorraine; in civilian life he may have been a peasant, a street arab, a student of philosophy, a future president of the Republic—it is all the same on that first of October, for now he is simply a conscript with two years' military training before him, and a halfpenny a day for his pay, together with a periodical allowance of tobacco, which is one of the luxuries that the French Army allows to its soldiers.

Arrived at his station the conscript finds his room, and is allotted a bed therein. He finds himself placed under a corporal who will teach him all about his rifle, manifest an interest in the cleanliness of his linen, see that he gets his hair cut, instruct him in drill, turn him out of bed in the morning, and see that he is in, or accounted for, when the roll is called at night. The first business of the conscript is to get fitted out from the store in which the battalion keeps clothes for its men. Here he gets his boots, his parade uniform, and his fatigue outfit. His captain, with the assistance of

the master tailor, passes the outfit as complete and correct, and the conscript says good-bye to civilian attire for a period of two years. There was one youngster, a Breton youth, who mourned for a week or two after coming to the colours, because the cow at home would not take its food from other people as it would from him; there are many who remember how they used to milk the goats, and these make humorous little tragedies for a time, for their fellow conscripts.

Like the British infantryman, the conscript is concerned principally in learning to march and shoot, and use his bayonet. In the matter of marching, to which reference has already been made, the training of the conscript is a complicated business. No walking that he has ever done as a civilian bears any relation to this curious half-shuffling trot, unless by chance he is a native of the Vosges country, and in that case he may recall a rapid climb up some steep hill, to which this business of the march is more nearly akin than to anything else. Perhaps he does not take kindly to his work at first, but, in addition to the corporal under whose charge he is placed, there are the men who sleep on either side of him to inculcate in him the first principles of discipline, for there is nothing on earth half so comforting to the man placed under a

system as to be able to give advice to a new-comer to the system and its disabilities.

Thus, with the assistance of the corporal and of his comrades, the new conscript settles to his work. Within a couple of months he has begun to understand the principle of this marching business, and, in common with all youngsters, he takes a pride in his new accomplishment. It is a tiring business, *certainement*, but then, what would you? A man must be taught, and, after all, it is only for two years, at the end of which one may go back to the cow or the goats, or the kerbstone, or the life of one who sits above these things—and Pierre, who occupies the corner bed, is an amusing rascal; it is not so bad, this military life, after all, but one would there were a little more money and a little more time. However . . .

The conscript must be taught to shoot. First of all, and not infrequently as a matter of necessity, he is taught the difference between the butt and the muzzle of a rifle. He is taught how to hold the thing, how to clean it, how to press its trigger, how to load it, and how to adjust its sights. He is made familiar with the weapon in the fullest sense of the word "familiar," for shooting is not altogether a matter of blazing away ammunition; the good shot is the man who has a thorough

knowledge of the various parts of his weapon, and who has been taught to nurse it and care for it just as the Breton lad nursed and cared for his cow. The equivalent of the British Morris tube is requisitioned to instruct the conscript in the first elements of firing a rifle. Across a large white target a thin black line is drawn horizontally, and the conscript is set to firing at this target until he can make reasonably consistent practice on the black line. His corporal is at hand to correct defects, and his sergeant is there too, to instruct and ever to instruct. By and by the conscript begins to feel with regard to his shooting as he feels about the marching. One must learn, and rifle shooting is not an unpleasant business, though the cleaning of the rifle is another matter, and they are wonderfully particular about the way in which it is done. That corporal and that sergeant must have eyes behind them.

Instruction in the use of the bayonet is very largely a similar sort of business, a matter of perpetual care on the part of the instructors and of gradually increasing efficiency on the part of the conscript. Then there is the gymnastic class, by means of which limbs are made supple, and muscles strengthened—it is only by continuous training that the marvellous efficiency to which the French con-

script attains in the short space of two years is compassed. There is no "furlough season" as British troops know it; the conscript goes up to work all the time, and in that period of work he is transformed from hobbledehoy to man.

Marching, the use of rifle and bayonet, and gymnastic classes, do not by any means exhaust the schedule of conscript training. There is all the business of barrack room life, the cleaning of equipment in which the corporal is ever at hand to instruct, and men in their second year are also at hand to advise and give hints; there are fatigues, white-washing, trench-digging, and all sorts of things of which in pre-military days, probably, the conscript never dreamed. There are route marches with the battalion, the commanding officer and band at the head. There is always something to do, always something waiting to be done, and in looking forward there is an endless succession of very busy days to contemplate. One goes to bed tired—very healthily tired—and one wakens to work. The work is not always pleasant, but it has the charm—if such it can be called—of never-ending variety. A monotonous variety it may be, but then, one has little time to think, and then there is always the

canteen, and Jean, who sleeps in the corner opposite Pierre, has just received his allowance from home. There is yet ten minutes before parade—we will go with Jean to the canteen. . . .

CHAPTER V

OFF DUTY

THERE is a strict but unwritten law of the French Army as regards the canteen: no man may take a drink by himself. *Faire suisse* is the term applied, if one goes to the canteen alone, and the rest of the men in the conscript's room look on him as something of a mean fellow if he does such a thing as this. Of course, it works out at the same thing in the end, and share and share alike is not a bad principle, while it is eminently good Republicanism. Jean must share his remittance from home with somebody; he can pick the men whom he desires to treat, but he must not lay himself open to the accusation of *faire suisse*, no matter what arm of the service he represents. It is bad comradeship, for his fellows, when they have a slice of luck, would not think of doing it. Why should he?

Thus, and with justice, they reason, and out of such reasoning comes the sharing of the last drops of water with a comrade on the field, the acts of

self-denial and courageous self-sacrifice for which men of the French Army have always been famed. It is a little thing in itself, this compulsory sharing of one's luck, but it leads to great things, at times.

Should Jean go to the canteen alone, punishment awaits him from his comrades. If he is well liked, he will get off with having his bed tipped up after he has got to sleep at night. If he is a surly fellow, he may reckon on what British troops know as a "blanket court-martial," which means that his comrades of the room will catch him and place him in a blanket, the edges of which are held all round by his fellow soldiers. At a given signal the blanket will be given a mighty heave upward by all who are holding it, and Jean will fly ceilingward, to alight again in the blanket and again be heaved up. This process, repeated a dozen times or so, leaves Jean with not a sufficiency of breath to beg for mercy, while at the same time he is quite undamaged, and, if he is wise, he will not incur the accusation of *faire suisse* again.

He may be fool enough to report the matter to his sergeant, as, by the rules of the service, he is entitled to do. In that case the sergeant will threaten Jean's comrades with punishment for causing annoyance to a man, but the threat, as the men well know, is all that will happen to them—

but not all that will transpire as regards Jean. The French soldier abhors a sneak, and treats him as he deserves. Jean will get a rough time for many days to come, and will not dare to complain to the sergeant again. It is rough justice, but effective; so long as a man plays the game properly with his fellows, he is all right, and the sergeant knows it. Hence Jean may make complaints till he is black in the face about the conduct of his fellows, but by so doing he will only make himself unpopular, and before he has got far into his first year of service he learns to take his own part, and not to go running to the sergeant with his little troubles. It does not pay—and, if it did, the French Army would not be what it is in the matter of comradeship and good feeling.

One good thing about the canteen is its cheapness. One can get coffee and a roll—which amounts to a French conscript's breakfast—for the equivalent of three halfpence, and this charge is a fair sample of the prices of all things. Whatever one may ask for, too, it is served in good quality, for the canteen is under strict supervision of the officers, who are quick to note and remedy any cause for complaint on the part of the men.

Early morning breakfast, as it is served in the British Army, is unknown in French units. On

turning out in the morning, coffee is brought round to the barrack rooms, but the first real meal of the day is "soup" at ten o'clock. The food is properly served in dishes, and a corporal or a man told off for the duty is at the head of each table to help each man to his allowance, for which an enamelled plate is provided. Crockery is unsafe in a barrack room, and the fact is wisely recognised.

The canteen of the British Army, so far as drinks are concerned, provides beer only for its men, but beer is scarcely ever seen in a French canteen. Various brands of wine are at the disposal of the conscript, and it is possible to get a bottle of drinkable stuff for fivepence, though in order to obtain a really good brand one must pay at least a franc, for which the wine obtained is equal to that for which many a London restaurant will charge half a crown. Wine is the staple drink of the Army, though brandy finds favour among the hardened drinkers. The man who goes to the canteen for a bottle of wine to share with a comrade must not be regarded as a tippler, for the clarets which the canteen provides are not very alcoholic beverages, containing as they do but little more alcohol to the pint than supposedly "teetotal" ginger beer of some brands.

To each company of infantry, as to each squad-

ron of cavalry and battery of artillery, is allotted a barber, whose business is to shave every conscript of his company at least twice a week free of cost, the barber being remunerated by the authorities. Since most men need to shave every day in order to fulfil the requirements of parade appearance, it is obvious that the efforts of the barber in this direction must be supplemented by the men themselves, and on the whole the barber gets an easy time as a rule, for the man who shaves himself three times a week will usually get the business done without troubling the barber at any time.

Complaints used to be made, especially in infantry stations, about the sanitation and lack of washing accommodation in French barracks, but modern custom has remedied all this. Chief cause of reformation was the Russo-Japanese War, which showed that an army is twice as effective if matters of sanitation are properly attended to—it does not pay to have men falling sick from the presence of nursery beds for infectious diseases. The French Army, ever first in experiment for the efficiency of its men and in search of ways to increase the fighting value of the forces available, has taken the lessons of modern sanitation to heart. In practically all barracks, now, the soldier can enjoy a hot bath or a cold one when he wishes;

all that is still to be desired is a greater regard for necessary sanitary measures, and a greater regard for personal cleanliness among the men themselves. The peasant lad, who has lived a comparatively lonely life in absolutely healthy surroundings, does not understand at first that barrack life exposes him to fresh dangers, and he has to be taught what, to a town dweller, are elementary facts as regards infection. For this reason, tubercular and allied complaints still rank rather high in the medical statistics of the French Army, though every year sees an improvement in this respect.

But a dissertation of this kind has taken us far from the canteen, and the methods employed by the conscript in spending his spare time. Not that the canteen is the only place of amusement, but in stated hours, as in the British Army, the canteen is the rallying point of men off duty. It is closed to men undergoing *salle de police* at all times, and this forms a not inconsiderable part of their punishment; for to a soldier the canteen is not merely a place where he may obtain refreshments, alcoholic and otherwise, but also a place to meet his friends, hear a good song, discuss the doings of various companies, and of various friends, whom he meets here and with whom he can compare notes. The barrack room may not contain more than one close

friend—if that—and the other men in the squad to which the conscript belongs may be of different provinces, of totally different ideals and ways of thought—as if a Highland Scot were planted down in a squad of Londoners. In the canteen, however, a man can be certain of meeting and sitting down for a confab with his own chums, men not only of his year—that is, joining on the same first of October as himself—but also hailing, perhaps, from the same town or village as himself, glad to share a bottle of claret at a franc the bottle and to talk over the things left behind with civilian clothing.

As for canteen songs, one may guess that in the French Army there is always plenty of real talent, for the nation as a whole, like all Latin nationalities, is a very musical one, and since all come to the Army, the singers come with the rest. The songs, perhaps, are not of the highest drawing-room order, even for French drawing-rooms, but the musical and vocal abilities of the singers are beyond question; for in a gathering of men where the best can be obtained, little short of the best ventures to bring itself to notice.

This mention of canteen songs recalls the fact that the French infantryman beguiles the tedium of route-marching by songs, interminably long songs which go on and on for miles; in recalling

what the next verse will be, a man forgets the number of miles between him and the end of the march, or he thinks he may be able to, which amounts to very nearly the same thing. They still sing songs that were in vogue at the time of Fontenoy, as they march at ease along the endless straight roads of the country, with their rifles slung anyhow and their formations broken up that friend may march with friend. This is when marching "at ease" only, for let a column of marching infantrymen come to the streets of a town, and they immediately stiffen up to show themselves at their best before the girls at the windows. The Army of the Republic is a part of the nation, but the women of the nation manifest no less interest in it for the fact that their fathers and brothers have served. There is something in the sound of a military band and the sight of a column of uniformed men that will always bring faces to the windows of a French house. "So our Jacques is perhaps marching somewhere," they say, or—"Thus we marched to relieve Bazaine," will remark a veteran of the '70 campaign, feeling the while that these men may yet make of "'70" a thing no longer to remember in connection with lost provinces. And, once the town or village street is left behind, and the road stretches unbroken before

the column, the men begin to sing again, and their officers smile at the song—they are too wise, in the French Army, to suppress the singing and the cigarette smoking, and thus the men march well. As well, certainly, as any infantry in the world, and probably better than most.

Although it is a conscript army, there are regimental traditions, as in the British or in any other service. Your conscript in his second year of service will tell how his regiment captured the colours here, or saved the position there, in the way-back days, and is nearly as proud of it as if he, instead of the fellow soldiers of his great-grandfather, were concerned in the business. *Esprit de corps*, though now a common phrase in connection with the British Army, was first of all a French idiom—and is yet, and an untranslatable one too—designed to express the French soldier's pride in his own unit of the service, or in his own branch of the service. At the present time, it has as much application to the French Army as in the day when the phrase was coined; pride in his own powers of endurance, and pride in the unit in which he serves, still characterise the French conscript, and in the last ten years or so this feeling has grown to such an extent as to place the French Army, although a conscript organisation, on a level with a voluntary force.

CHAPTER VI

CAVALRY.

AS in all armies, the French cavalryman considers himself as good as two infantrymen; the origin of this may probably be traced back through time to feudal days, when only the better classes of vassals were able to provide horses with which to come to the standard of the feudal chief. Certain it is that even in these present days of scientific warfare, when the guns and rifles count equally with the swords of an Army Corps, the cavalryman still looks on himself as a superior person, more efficient and more to be admired than a mere gunner or a mere man in a line regiment of infantry. Certainly, he rides, and this fact he is always ready to impress on the infantryman; what he keeps quiet about is that he has to groom the horse he rides, and to attend to its needs when the infantryman, having finished his march at practically the same time the cavalryman finished his, has his meal cooked and eaten before his fellow of the mounted unit has got away from stables.

Considering that the time of the infantry conscript is fully occupied in the compression of all his tuition into his two years of service, it may be imagined that the way of the cavalryman is not an easy one, for he has far more to learn than the infantryman. He has not only to learn to use the carbine which corresponds in his case to the infantry rifle, and to execute movements on foot, but he has to groom his horse, clean his saddle, keep the stables in order, and do all the things that are absolute necessities where horses are concerned, as well as having nearly twice as much personal kit to look after as the infantryman—and then he has to be trained in the use of the sword, that of the lance in some regiments, and to add to his other drills the business of riding school.

The horses of French cavalry, as a whole, are not so well cared for as those of the English cavalry regiment; methods used in connection with the care of horses are not so complete and perfect, and the stock itself is not such well-bred stuff, as a whole, as the horseflesh that goes to the British Army from Irish and other breeding establishments. At the same time, the cavalry trooper is taught how to care for his mount in his own way, and, trained in a harder school, French horses of the cavalry are tougher than those of English

regiments. If a unit from each army were placed side by side in a position in which there was no chance of feeding horses on full rations of forage, but all had to live on the country and make the best of it for a time, the French animals would probably come out better of the two from the ordeal, since they are more used to hardships in time of peace. The British trooper is taught to treat his horse as he would a baby, while the French soldier, inured to rigorous discipline himself, has a horse that shares his own circumstances.

The cavalry conscript elects to serve in a mounted unit, for, on the 1st of October on which a man comes up for his training, he is given choice between cavalry, artillery and infantry service, as far as the exigencies of the service will permit. Like the infantry recruit, he begins his service by drawing kit and clothing and fitting the latter to the satisfaction of his superior officers; in addition to the equivalent of the kit drawn from store by the infantryman, however, the cavalry conscript must draw stable kit and cleaning materials, spurs and all that goes to make the difference between the mounted and the dismounted soldier. Unlike modern practice in the British cavalry, the way with the French conscript is to get on teaching him at once as much as possible; riding school, foot drill,

gymnastic exercises, and stable work are all crowded into his day, for there are but two years available before he will go back to civilian attire and ways. And there is much to teach him; more, really, than two years can be made to serve for. It may be said that, except in the case of men who were skilled riders before they came up for training, the French cavalry conscript is not a complete soldier by the time he has finished his two years, for it is impossible that he should be. All that can be done to make him efficient is done, though, and the difference between the finished article, going back to civilian avocations, and the conscript from which he is formed, is little short of marvellous. Detractors from the merits of a conscript system overlook the effect on the conscript as regards physique and moral stamina; out of the rough schooling men emerge far more fitted for the battle of life than they entered, and the net effect of military training in a cavalry regiment—two years of it, taken as the French soldier is made to take his training—is in nineteen cases out of twenty all to the good.

Riding-school is a serious business; when a man first leads his horse through the riding-school entrance and mounts, he learns what a perfect brute—from his point of view—an instructor can be, and it is not until he is nearing the end of his period

of riding-school instruction that he learns to look on the instructor as not a bad fellow, a bit strict at his work, but responsible for the turning out of some of the finest riders in the world. For in horsemanship the French soldier is no whit behind his English confrère, and it is only in recent years that the British Army has taken up the circus tricks which for many years have been practised in the French Army in order to make men thoroughly familiar with their mounts. A conscript is taught not only to ride a saddled horse, but also to vault on to the back of a cantering horse, to make his horse lie down, and various other tricks—they are nothing more in themselves—which give him thorough confidence in himself and thorough knowledge of the capabilities, intelligence, and nature of his horse. Recognising the wisdom of this form of teaching, the British Army has of late adopted it, to the betterment of cavalry riding as a whole.

The new *loi de trois ans*, introduced in the war ministry of M. Viviani, will be to the advantage of the French cavalry, when it has had chance of a fair trial—it had hardly become a definite law before the outbreak of war put a stop to peace training and peace organisation. But, when things become normal again, it is certain that the cavalry will benefit by the extension of the period of

service, and although they were perfectly capable of taking the field when need arose, French cavalry will be improved in quality by the additional training. This applies not so much to the main points of drill and discipline as to little things; veterinary tricks and ways, capacity for individual service, and self-dependence in the fullest sense, especially to the extent demanded of the man who goes out on patrol work and scouting duty, are not to be learned as thoroughly as could be wished in two years, but must be ingrained by experience as well as by tuition.

Before his first year of training is concluded the cavalry conscript is expected to have learned all that the riding-school can teach him. In addition to the class of riding which may be termed circus work, and is taught on horses with handled pads instead of saddles, the recruit is initiated into bending lessons, by which his horse is rendered flexuous and easily amenable to pressure of leg and rein. It is worthy of note, by the way, that the principle on which the modern training of horses is based is due to a Frenchman, who brought to England what were at the time considered revolutionary principles with regard to riding.

The method by which the French conscript is trained at riding school is of such a nature that it

trains horse and man at the same time. At the beginning of training with saddles the ride is formed of about sixteen men who walk, trot, and canter their mounts along sides of a square in single file. The man is made to ride his horse well into the corners of the square and to make three turns sharply, and, when men have acquired full control of their horses so as to be able to perform this simple movement properly, they are taken on to more complex matters. While strung out along one side of the square, at the word of command each man turns his horse at a direct right angle, proceeds across the square, and, turning again at a right angle on the far side, the ride forms single file again and proceeds. A diagonal movement of the same nature is then taught; men are taught to halt their horses suddenly and rein them back a length or two; they are taught when at the canter to cause their horses to passage sideways across the square, and, in fact, are instructed to make every movement of which a horse is capable. At first, as may be assumed, the tuition is carried out with trained horses, but, as men become advanced in the art and practice of riding, they are put on to younger horses, and it will be easily understood that, in learning himself to make the horse execute the movements, the cavalryman trains the horse to its work as well as increasing his own knowledge.

In the matter of foot drill there is not so much to learn in the cavalry as in the infantry. Cavalry foot drill, as a matter of fact, is practically a replica of the drill to which troops and squadrons of men are subjected when mounted. The principle governing cavalry foot drill in practically all armies consists in assuming that a man shall not be called on to execute a movement which he cannot execute on horseback, as, otherwise, confusion might arise in the course of mounted drill. It would be interesting, for instance, if cavalry were taught infantry drill, to see what would happen if a squadron of mounted men were ordered to form fours in the infantry style.

Actual foot movements do not by any means comprise the total of drill that the cavalry conscript must learn on foot before applying it to mounted work. The use of the sword and also that of the lance are first thoroughly taught to squads of dismounted men, and a recruit must be fully conversant with sword and lance exercise before he ventures to perform either offensive or defensive movements with either of these weapons on horseback. The unskilled man waving a sword about when mounted would probably do more damage to his horse's eyes and ears than to anything else, and the man with the lance, if unskilled, would

probably find himself dismounting involuntarily if he tried to use the lance on a spirited horse. Thus men are taken out, dismounted, in squads; each man assumes the position which he would occupy on horseback with feet well apart, knees bent and toes turned to the front—an exhausting posture to maintain for any length of time. In this attitude the recruit is taught such movements as are requisite to full control of sword and lance. For final training in the use of these weapons men are given fencing outfits and set in pairs to oppose each other. When they have attained to proficiency, the whole business is repeated on horseback, and by that time their training for actual field work in the ranks is practically complete.

The part of his work that the cavalry conscript likes least is the grooming and sweeping up and cleaning of saddlery in the stables. There is a morning stable hour with which the day begins; there are about two hours before midday which must be devoted to grooming, cleaning saddlery, sweeping up, etc., and there is another hour or so to be spent at stables in the afternoon, when the “orders of the day” are read out to the men by the sergeant-major of the squadron or his representative.

As is the case in the infantry, each conscript, on

arriving at the regiment in which he is to serve, is allotted to the charge of a corporal, who instructs him in all things pertaining to his work, and takes charge of him on *corvées*, the equivalent to the "fatigues" of the British Army. *Corvées* include the carrying of forage from the stores to stable, fetching coal for the cooks, whitewashing where and when necessary, building riding-school jumps, and, in fact, all and every class of work which men are unable to perform individually for themselves. Much of this work is undergone by the men sentenced to *salle de police*, which is the equivalent of the British Army's punishment known as "days to barracks," with the addition that the offenders sleep in the guard room at night instead of in the barrack room. This of course involves entire confinement to barracks, which no offender is allowed to quit unless he is on duty; it also involves no possibility of attendance at the canteen at any time of the day, and, further, the man sentenced to *salle de police* devotes practically all the spare time that is his under normal circumstances to some form of *corvée*. On the whole, however, the punishment is not so severe as it appears, for, with the exception of sleeping in the guard room at night, and rising exceptionally early in the morning, a man undergoing *salle de police* is not de-

barred from the society of his comrades, and there is usually some good-natured chum willing to fetch canteen produce, and thus make up for at least one of the deficiencies involved.

This last, however, must be done when the corporal is not looking, or else both men are likely to get into trouble. Strict discipline is the rule and the conscript is expected to take his punishment—when he incurs it—as part of his training. It must be added as a mark of the quality of the material of which the French Army is composed that punishments and rewards alike are usually accepted in equally good part.

The corporal, who is the superior officer with whom the conscript is brought most frequently in contact, sleeps in the same room as his squad; he is thus able to give men hints with regard to riding school work; he trains his squad at elementary drill, both mounted and dismounted; he instructs men in the way in which clothing should be folded for placing on the shelf, and the way in which to clean kit and equipment. In the matter of troop drill the conscript is taught his work by the sergeant of the *peloton* or troop, and the sergeant in turn is responsible to the lieutenant or sub-lieutenant over him. He is also responsible to the sergeant-major of the squadron, and through him

to the senior captain of the squadron. To follow the matter through, the senior captain is responsible to the *Chef d'Escadrons*, who again is responsible to the commanding officer of the regiment. Decentralisation of command has been an important factor in French military training for many years, and although the responsibilities of the corporal and sergeant pass through so many grades before they reach the ultimate head of affairs, both these lower ranks are extremely important items in the discipline and training of the French cavalry regiments.

There is one system pursued both in the cavalry and in the artillery of the French Army which leads to pleasant expeditions for a certain number of men in each of these branches of the service. The system referred to is that of boarding out a certain number of horses away from regimental control for that portion of the year which the regiment spends in barracks. When the time approaches for the regiment to go on manœuvres, a party usually made up of a sergeant, possibly a corporal, and two or three troopers, goes round to the farms where these horses are at grass, and inspects them with a view to reporting on their condition and fitness for use. As may be imagined, the men selected for these expeditions are envied their appoint-

ments, for it is a pleasant matter to get away from the discipline and strict routine of service with the regiment for a time, and, if the sergeant in charge is a companionable man, the whole affair becomes a perfect picnic for the men concerned. On expeditions of this kind men are perfectly certain of receiving full hospitality at such places as they may visit, and altogether the trip is as good as the furlough which the conscript, unlike his British *confrère*, does not get, save in exceptional circumstances. The two years in which a man must become fully conversant with his work is too short a period, in view of the number of duties he has to learn, to admit of holidays.

Altogether, the life of the cavalry conscript in barracks is not by any means an unpleasant business. A comparatively large number of men, when given the choice of the arm of the service in which to serve, request to be sent to the cavalry. The majority of those joining cavalry regiments are used to horses in some way—and by this is implied very many ways indeed, and very many kinds of horse. French cavalry as a whole is built up out of good material; the spirit of the men is good; the reputation of the French cavalry for horse-mastership is as wide as it is deserved, and, bearing in mind the period of active service for which men

are required to serve, it may safely be said that there is no better body of cavalry troops in the world than the French. This remark, however, cannot be reckoned as a wise one if the speaker is addressing a British cavalryman, who always regards himself as a member of the premier squadron in the best regiment of the very finest cavalry force existent. But then, the French cavalryman will tell the same story.

CHAPTER VII

ARTILLERY

IN the matter of armament and the quality thereof, French artillery is second to none; but in the matter of numbers the Field Artillery might have been stronger when considered relatively with the total strength of the French Army. If the conscript electing to join either infantry or cavalry considers himself in for a hard time, then it would be difficult to say what are the anticipations of the conscript who goes to service with the guns, for his work is practically twice as hard as that of the average infantryman. Still, he makes up for increase of work by a relaxation of discipline, and, after all, the conscript's two years comes to about the same thing in the end, no matter what branch of the service he may choose. For, just as there is a limit to a man's endurance or efficiency, so there is a limit to the amount of knowledge that a man can absorb in a given period. The infantry conscript absorbs all the knowledge

possible in the allotted time: the artillery conscript can do no more.

It may be said, in fact, that the artillery conscript has a better time of it than his fellows in either infantry or cavalry, for his work is rendered more interesting than theirs by reason of its being more varied. The artillery driver, certainly, is in much the same position as the cavalryman, for his life is made up of horses and stables, riding, driving, grooming, and care for the fitness and cleanliness of harness and saddlery. He has a very busy life, this artillery driver, and his remarks, on coming in on a wet day after two or three hours' parade with the guns, might cause a little consternation in what is known as polite society, for two muddy horses with their saddlery and fittings, all to be dried and cleaned for the battery officer's inspection within a given time, are not conducive to elegance of expression or to restraint.

But compensation comes in the relaxation of the rigid discipline which the infantryman, and to a certain extent the cavalryman, have to undergo. This will appear more clearly when one understands that infantrymen and cavalymen alike need supervision throughout the whole of their day's work. Their tasks are mainly of drill and routine: made work, a good bit of it, in order to render

them thoroughly efficient soldiers. The made work of the artillery driver consists in rendering him efficient in the art of controlling two of the horses which draw the gun, under all possible and many impossible conditions. By the time his training is completed, he has learned to harness up and turn out quickly, and is capable of obeying without hesitation any word of command the battery officer may give with regard to the evolutions of the battery as a whole. He is trained in the matter of casualties; that is to say, he is taught to regard one of his horses as suddenly injured or dead, and knows exactly what to do to make the best of the loss, in case such a casualty may occur. "Unlimber" and "limber up," as words of command, find him equally unmoved and equally alert; he is, at his best, a confident, self-reliant man, a far different being from the raw youth who, on a certain first of October, came to be initiated into the mysteries of artillery driving.

These things comprise very nearly all of what may be termed the made work of the artillery driver, the work that is arranged with a special view to making him an efficient soldier in time of war. The rest of his work is absolutely necessary to the well-being of himself and the two horses under his charge. As a matter of course, he must

keep himself and his kit smart and clean—as smartness is known in the French Army. He must groom his horses, and keep their equipment in good order; he must keep the stables clean; he must assist the gunners in the *corvées* necessary to the maintenance of health, good order, and efficiency in the battery. Bearing in mind the fact that this one man is responsible not only for himself, in the way that an infantryman is, but is also responsible for his two horses and all their outfit, it will be seen that there is not much time for the discipline which, in the case of the infantryman, is practically indispensable to the thorough control of the man and the full efficiency of the regiment. The artillery driver is a busy man, who considers himself, by reason of the amount of work that he gets through, a far more capable man than either an infantryman or a cavalryman; in the driver's estimation, the only class of man who comes anywhere near him as regards efficiency and soldierly qualities is the gunner, and, the driver will say, the gunner is not quite so good a man as the driver. This spirit, common to each branch of the French Army, augurs well for the efficiency and fighting value of all arms of the service.

Gunners in the French Army, as far as Field Artillery is concerned, differ from English gunners

in that they only ride on the limber and on the gun when there is actual need that they should accompany the gun. English gunners always ride, but in the French Army it is considered better to save the horses by reducing the weight that they have to draw to the lowest possible amount. On long marches the gunners turn out two or three hours earlier than the drivers, and march like infantry to the appointed destination for the day. Although turning out later with horses and guns, the drivers usually reach camp at the end of the day quite as soon as the gunners, for the trot is maintained where possible, and, with a light load to draw, artillery horses are able to get over ground quickly. This system has much to commend it; it hardens the gunners, and is far better for their general health than sitting on a gun or limber which jolts, springless, along a country road; at the same time, it increases the mobility of the artillery, and renders horses more fresh and fit for their work in case of several days in succession, devoted to marching to a distant destination. The only drawback to the practice consists in its being useless in time of war, when the gunners must at all times accompany the guns and be ready for instant action.

The work of the gunners is quite as hard as that

of the drivers of Field Artillery, and quite as varied. Coming to the battery with absolutely no knowledge of the ways of using a gun, the raw conscript is taught the work of half a dozen men, for, as in the case of the drivers, each man has to be able to replace casualties in the ranks. The actual drill to which a gunner is subjected is a complicated business; there is a good deal of hopping and jumping about and aside, for each man must learn to perform his part in loading, sighting, and firing his gun, and at the same time each man must keep out of the way of the rest. A gun crew amounts to a dozen or so of men: there are the men concerned in the getting out of ammunition, others busied over the actual loading, and yet others engaged in sighting the gun and firing at the word of command; each of these men must be taught the duties of all the rest, for, when a battery is actually in action, casualties must be anticipated, and the men who are loading must be prepared to get out ammunition if required, must be able to set the time fuse of a shell for a given range, able to load, sight, and fire the gun. Thus one man has to learn the various tasks which a dozen perform, though to each is allotted a definite place, and each is specially trained for the performance of a definite part.

Naturally, this training fully occupies all the two years of the gunner conscript's service, and there is little time to spare. The fuss and fret of discipline is correspondingly reduced; when a man is thoroughly busy, and interested in his work as any man must be over a gun, if he is in the least mechanically inclined, he needs no undue pressure to keep him up to his work; the gunner, if he has any sense of the responsibility and nature of his work, gets sufficiently interested in it, and sufficiently keen over the points that he has to master, to render him independent of more than actual tuition. The pleasure that comes to the sportsman over a remarkably successful shot, or to the cricketer over a good boundary hit, is akin to the feeling experienced by the gunner as he learns part after part of his gun, and finds himself well on the way to gaining complete control over the tremendous power that the gun represents.

But this comes late in the training period, and is not attained easily. There is so much to learn; the way in which a shell is timed, for instance, is a complex piece of work that must be understood, to a certain extent, by the gunner who has to do the timing; that is to say, the mechanism of the shell, and the nature of the timing apparatus, have to be taught the man as well as the mere action of

turning the ring to the required point and "setting the fuse." Traversing and sighting the gun, elevation and depression, are movements that explain themselves as they are taught; sighting to a given range seems easy, but is not so easy in practice, for the sighting of a gun has to be done swiftly and accurately—there must be no mistake in the range, for a shell costs more money than the total pay of the conscript during his two years of service, and to throw those costly projectiles to points at which they explode without effect is a silly business.

To each man his part in the whole, and absolute efficiency in the part—that is the ideal to which the training of the gunner is directed; the quality of the French field artillery in action in this, their latest real experience of war, attests how well the ideal has been realised. Outnumbered by their opponents in batteries and regiments, often confronted with guns of far heavier calibre than their own, they have given good account of themselves, and shown that the crews of the 75-millimetre gun are capable of holding their own as far as lies within the bounds of human possibility.

With regard to the custom of sending forward gunners on foot, this practice is also followed in the case of reserve drivers, or drivers who are not needed for the actual transport of the guns and

limbers on the march. They are formed up in rear of the gunners, and are marched off on foot with the latter instead of adding to the weight that the horses have to pull, leaving only such officers and men as are actually necessary to travel with the guns.

The artillery officer's training course is more severe than that undergone by any other branch of the service, as, in view of the complicated and responsible nature of his duties, it needs to be. An artillery officer, gaining his commission after the fashion of a British officer who elects to join the Army by way of Sandhurst or Woolwich, goes first to the *École Polytechnique*, the highest engineering school of France; after completing the course here, the officer of artillery is sent on to the artillery school at Fontainebleau, where a year is spent in further training, and then the youngster is considered competent to take his place as lieutenant in an artillery battery. The percentage of artillery officers gaining their commissions from the ranks is smaller than that of other branches of the service, and it is seldom that such officers reach higher than the rank of captain, for, in order to learn all that is required of the higher ranks of commissioned officer in the artillery, an officer needs to start young, and a course at the *École Polytechnique* is

almost an essential. By the time a man has worked his way through the various grades of non-commissioned officer and is thus eligible for such a course, he is usually too old to take kindly to school work.

Altogether, artillery service is not a light business in the French Army—it is not in any army, for that matter. Both gunners and drivers must take themselves seriously, and officers of the artillery must take themselves most seriously of all, with the possible exception of engineer officers. The modern rifle is a complicated weapon when compared with the musket of a hundred years ago; but in comparison with the rifle, the big gun of the Army of to-day has advanced in construction and power to an enormously greater extent. The character of the projectile has changed altogether from the old-fashioned round shot to a missile which is in itself a gun, carrying its own exploding charge and small projectiles within itself. The range of the modern gun is limited only by the necessity to make the gun mobile in the field, and by the range of human sight or power to judge the position of the target. The gunners of to-day, and the officers who command them, must be skilled workmen, possessed of no little mechanical ability in addition to their military qualities. They must be not only

soldiers, but artificers, mechanics, engineers, mathematicians—skilled men in every way. The efficiency of the French artillery to-day is largely due to the French turn of mind, which is eminently suited to the solving of those mathematical problems with which the work of those who control the big guns abounds.

CHAPTER VIII

IN CAMP AND ON THE MARCH

MANŒUVRES fall at the end of the military year in the French Army, being so arranged in order that the second-year conscripts shall pass out from the Army and back to their ordinary civilian avocations as soon as they return to barracks and have time to hand in their equipment and arms. For the majority of these men, it is two years since they have had time to see their friends, save for a stray day or two of leave here and there for the man whose people live within a short distance of the training-place to which he has been drafted, or a stray visitor who brings news from home to one or other at infrequent intervals. Thus manœuvres mean a good deal to the conscript; even the first-year men catch the infection from their fellows with regard to the approaching time for going away, and there is as well the sense for these juniors that, when they return to barracks, they will no longer be first-year men, but able to advise and instruct such raw

recruits as they themselves were just a year ago. Added to this, again, is the sense of freedom that comes from knowing of the days of marching, billeting, and sight of fresh places and people from day to day, and it will be seen that the change from barrack life with its perpetual round of work to the constantly varying scenes of manœuvres is one which is anticipated with pleasure by all.

About a week, or perhaps more, before the time has come for the army corps concerned—or the cavalry or other divisions concerned—to set out on its march to the manœuvre area, the cavalry and artillery send out their patrols to gather up the horses which have been boarded out at farms for the summer, and the men of these patrols are almost invariably billeted on the inhabitants of the districts round which they have to ride on their errand. It is a pleasant task, this; the year is at its best, and summer just so far advanced that the early rising, the riding through the day, and the evening tasks are alike easy. The weather is good, the life is not too hard, and the party too small to admit of strict discipline being maintained; the men know that their picnic-time is due to their having been specially chosen as reliable for such work, and consequently they do not abuse their freedom.

And the horses come in from grass to train for

what a horse can never understand, though it is in the knowledge of all that a horse comes to know his place in the ranks of the cavalry or in the traces of the gun team, and would gladly go back to that place after he has been cast out from the service to drudgery between the two shafts of a cart or cab. Perhaps the horses have their own thoughts about going on manœuvres, and the change from stable life—such of them as have been kept in stables while the troops are in barracks—to the open air existence which is theirs in camp.

It is a great day for the conscript when the regiment marches out from barracks. Farewell for a time, and in the case of the second-year men farewell for good, to the barrack routine. They leave in barracks the things they will not require on field service, the materials for what the British soldier knows as “spit and polish soldiering,” and the conscript starts out with his field kit and equipment, prepared to have a good time.

The infantry swing out through the barrack gates, a long column of marching men; they talk among themselves of what they will do when manœuvres are over; the second-year men talk of going away, back to their homes, and of turning their backs on military service; they have done the duty their country asked of them, and now are

at liberty to think of a good time—almost a holiday, in spite of the hard work and marching involved, with which they will end their service—to last them through the coming weeks, after which they will resume civilian attire and work. It has been a hard business, this conscript period, but France asked it, and *ma foi*, but we are men now! The stern strictness of the instructors, the unending discipline imposed by sergeants and corporals, the everlasting watchfulness of the adjutant over buttons and boots and the correct method of saluting—proper perspective, rapidly growing in the mind of the man nearing the end of his second year, assures him that these things are needs of a good army. And then, he is going out on manœuvres, among the apple orchards or the hill villages; he is going to show the country what its soldiers are like, and almost, but not quite, he regrets that the end of his period of military service is nearly in sight. The time to which he looks forward colours his view of all things; the barracks are behind, and before him is the open road—that long, straight road which, in so many districts of France, goes on and on across bare plains, to human sight a thread laid right across the fabric of the world without bend or divergence. A road of white dust which, as soon as the barracks are left behind, rises from

the many footsteps of the marching men and envelops the column. The band in front goes free of the dust, and well it is that the throats of the bandsmen are not choked and dried with the insidious stuff, for one marches better, far better, with the music.

Somebody starts a song, for the regiment is marching at ease. A squad takes it up, and it spreads through the company—the company in rear has already started its own song, a different one. Interminably that song goes on, and the miles slip behind. At the end of every hour the column halts, and its men fall out for five minutes' rest—a good custom, this, for one can get rid of some of the dust, and often get a drink of water from a wayside spring—or Jean, who always gets enough money from home to satisfy the desires of his heart, has brought a bottle. It would be in the last degree injudicious to incur the accusation of *faire suisse* on this first day of the march, and Jean has long since learned wisdom over such points of etiquette. Jean wants to keep the bottle till the next halt, but it is pointed out to him that the morning is already warm, and to carry a bottle for another hour when one might empty it—with assistance—and be saved the labour of transporting it further, is very bad judgment. Jean needs

little persuasion—but it is time to fall in and resume the march: the bottle gets emptied while the column is marching, and Jean is voted *un brave garçon*—as undoubtedly he is, in other things beside this.

Shrouded in dust the column goes on. The grey-headed colonel is at the head, then comes the band, and then the men of the regiment follow, at ease, singing, smoking, chatting together. They pass through a village street in which is a simple monument to the men who fell in '70, and the colonel pulls his men up to attention while they pass through the street. Quietly, and with something ominous in the manner of their march, the men pass out to the open road again, where "at ease" is the order once more. But, when they march steadily at attention, these French infantrymen seem the embodiment of military strength and efficiency. The Army has taken them and made of them what it meant to make, and, Breton lad or Paris gamin, they are stamped with the mark of the Army—they are soldiers of the Republic, marching items which, apart from their personal characteristics, mean each a rifle and a bayonet for France when the hour shall strike. Over successive horizons they go, stopping every hour for their five minutes; they grow heedless of the band

at the head of the column, and scarcely know whether it is playing or no; one or two fall out, perhaps, for the first days of the march throw out from the ranks all the unfit; there is a doctor at hand to see to those who fall out, and the column swings on. Some time, after what seems to the men very many hours, the band strikes up definitely and with an indefinable new note—and the men know they are marching into camp. Food and sleep are not far ahead; the column stiffens at the call from the grey-haired colonel, and swings on to the camping-ground apparently as fresh as when the men passed out from the barrack gate. It is a part of their pride that they should come in well, should end their march like soldiers and men, not like weaklings.

The cavalry also go out from the barracks with anticipations of good times ahead. Unlike the infantry, they have to keep formation when marching at ease as when marching at attention, for you cannot get a horse to rein back into the rank behind you or come up to the rank in front of you as easily as you yourself can drop back or go up, and, moreover, you cannot regain your place in the ranks at the call of "attention" as an infantryman can. But there are compensations. The "fours" of men divide into twos, of which each

takes one side of the road; there is room in between the two inner men for the clouds of dust to roll about, and, although some of the stuff comes up, especially as regards the rear of the squadron, one is not so much down in it as the soldier on foot. One sees the country, too; the infantryman, keeping his place in his company, is just one of a crowd, and, in marching along and getting very tired—so the cavalryman says—he has no chance of looking about him and seeing what the country that he is marching through is like. One's horse does all the work, in the cavalry march, and one is merely a spectator, enjoying the fine day and the new scenery. It is good to be in the cavalry, and who would be an infantryman, when manœuvres start? Patrol duty, for instance, and the isolated tasks that take patrols of three and four men to farm-houses where the milk is good and one is invited—yes, invited!—to pick fruit from the trees—what infantryman knows anything of joys like these? Assuredly it is a good thing that one chose to serve in the cavalry.

Supposing it is the first time one has gone out on manœuvres, there are all sorts of pleasant speculations in which one can indulge. Guillaumette, the surly fellow, who when in barracks always occupies the next bed and snores so atrociously—he who is

not always perfectly innocent of *faire suisse*, though he has the luck of a pig, and never gets caught at any of his mean tricks—Guillaumette will be going away when one returns to barracks at the end of the manœuvres, and who shall say what pleasant kind of a comrade may not come from among the new recruits to take his place? Jacques, for instance, who belongs to the third *peloton* has a first-year man in the next bed to him, one who is the son of a deputy, and has always plenty of money. When the deputy's son was for guard and was warned for duty so late that he could not possibly get ready in time, Jacques lent him kit and helped him to turn out, with the result that Jacques had five francs—five francs, think of it!—with which to go to the canteen. And, soon after one has got back off manœuvres, the new recruits will be coming in; one will be a second-year man, then, with perhaps a deputy's son to sleep in the next bed and dispense five francs at a time to one who knows all the little ways of soldiering and can be of use. The possibilities, both of the manœuvres themselves and of what comes after, are endless, and speculation on them is a pleasant business. Surly old Sergeant Lemaire, too, is almost sure to get promotion this year, and the *peloton* will get another sergeant to take charge of it—certainly not

one with a worse temper, for that would be impossible.

And the long road slips behind, while the troopers conjecture with regard to their future, talk together of horses bad and good, sergeants and corporals bad and good, comrades also bad and good; they smoke as they ride, and talk yet more of horses, for any army of the world the cavalrymen never tire of talking of horses and their own riding abilities, while in the French Army boasting of one's own horsemanship, and all the rest of one's own good qualities, is even more common than it is among English soldiers. Not that the boasting among either is carried to a nauseous extent, but the soldier is so subject to discipline, so used to doing good work with only the official recognition by way of return, that, knowing the work is good, he talks about it himself since nobody is there to do the talking for him—and this is especially true of the cavalry.

Some time ago Conan Doyle created in "Brigadier Gerard" an excellent picture of a French cavalry officer of the old type, and to some extent the picture of Gerard—the most human and realistic figure Conan Doyle has ever penned, by the way—still holds good as regards both officers and men. One may find in both officers and men

of the French cavalry to-day much of the absolute disregard of risks, rather than bravery as that is understood among the English, which characterises the brigadier. There is, too, much of Gerard's vanity in modern French cavalry officers and men, much of his susceptibility to influence, and all of his absolute loyalty to a superior. The French cavalryman will tell his comrades how he dislikes his squadron officer, but he will follow that squadron officer anywhere and into any danger—his loyalty is sufficient for any test that may be imposed on him. Like Gerard, he will brag of the things he has done, will devote much time to explaining exactly how he did them and how no other man could have done them just as well, until a British cavalryman, if he were listening, would tell the speaker to pass the salt and hire a trumpeter to blow for him. But, though the French cavalryman is true to the Gerard picture in that he boasts inordinately, it will be found, when one has got to close acquaintance with him, that he does not boast without reason. He has done a good thing—why not talk about it, for if he does not nobody else will? The British attitude toward a boaster is one of contempt, since the man who boasts generally does little, and exaggerates that little out of recognition. But the French cavalryman boasts—and acts too;

like the Englishman, he does his work, and, unlike the Englishman, he talks about it. But it must always be remembered that he acts as well as talks.

The picture of Gerard, however, is not a faithful portrait of the French cavalry officer of to-day, for the modern French officer takes his work far more seriously than Gerard took his, and understands it more fully. For forty years or more French officers, in common with the rest of the nation, have known that there would come a life and death struggle with Germany; they have set themselves to the task of mastering the difficulties attendant on the crushing of the invaders and the avenging of Sedan—no matter to what arm of the service the French officer may belong, he is first a soldier, and after that a man. Gerard, on the other hand, was man first and officer afterwards. The difference has been brought about by the training which the Army of the Third Republic imposes on its officers, and since that Army is a conscript force, the difference is of itself a necessity.

And it should always be borne in mind, especially by those who deplore the training of the citizens of France into so huge an army, that the step has been vital to the life of the nation. With a far smaller population than Germany, France has been compelled, as a matter of self-preservation,

to keep pace with Germany in the means adopted with regard to military training, has had to train and arm man for man, produce gun for gun—and when the hour of trial came it was found that the preparation had been none too great—there was not one trained man but was needed to cope with the national enemy, with Prussian militarism and Prussian greed of conquest. The conscript Army of the Third Republic, unlike that of its eastern neighbour and unlike the huge levies that Napoleon the First raised, has been intended as a means of defence only; the worst enemy of the Republic cannot accuse it of having maintained all its effective citizens as soldiers with a view to aggression in any direction. The Army is, because it must be for the safety of the nation, not because the nation desires territory or conquest.

And all this time the squadrons are marching along the straight roads that led over far horizons and to things unguessed, unseen by the first-year men.

They stop, at intervals along their marching line, to water their horses, loosen girths, and stretch themselves; they walk about the roads and look at each other's mounts; they share packets of cigarettes—those cigarettes made of black French tobacco that wither the back of the throat when first

one inhales smoke from them. The lieutenant or sub-lieutenant comes round the troop to inspect the horses and see that all are fit, and the sergeant comes round too, probably to point out to the lieutenant some loose shoe or rubbing girth that the less experienced eye of the commissioned youngster has failed to detect. Then girths are tightened, the men mount again, and go on, dividing the road between them as before.

As camp draws near, the line of men grows silent, or at least more silent than at the setting out, and the horses take their work steadily rather than eagerly, for this is their first day out, and they are not yet hardened to long marches.

Then camp. The putting down of the lines, grooming, blanketing up for the night, feeding—one cast a glance over toward where the infantry have come in and got to their own meals, for this is the time when a cavalryman may have doubts as to whether it would not have been better, after all, to have joined the infantry. Unworthy thoughts, these—is there anything in the world like a cavalryman, for real soldierly merit?

This business of believing one's own branch of the service to be infinitely superior to any other is carried into the different branches of the same arm, as well as existing between the three arms as a

whole. The cavalryman knows that service in the cavalry is infinitely to be preferred to service in infantry or artillery, but further, if he is a Dragoon, he knows that neither Cuirassier nor Chasseur nor Hussar is nearly as good as himself, and the Cuirassier, the Chasseur, and the Hussar have equally strong beliefs about the unquestionable superiority of their own branches of the cavalry. Each branch, in the opinion of its members, can produce the best riders, the best shots, the best all-round soldiers, and the best officers. It is a harmless belief, maintained quite impersonally.

Evening stables finished, the night guards are warned for their duty, the men settle down to the chief meal of the day, and later they sleep, the sound, healthy sleep induced by a long day in the open air. They waken or are wakened early in the morning, and again they saddle up and go on, for often the manœuvre area is many miles from the barracks, and days may be devoted to straight-forward marching before the mimic warfare begins.

One comes back to the guns, the long, murderous tubes that trail, each behind six horses, just above the dust of the roads. The drivers are there and the battery officers, but the seats on the guns are empty, for the most part, for the gunners have marched out from camp very early in the morning.

The drivers are at a disadvantage, compared with the men of cavalry or infantry—and even compared with their own gunners; for if a cavalryman has to keep his place in the ranks when mounted, then the gunner is absolutely a fixture in the battery. There can be no dropping back to talk to a comrade, whatever the pretext may be, for no man could take back with him the horse he is riding and the one he is leading, when both are in the gun team. The driver rides sombrely alone; the lead driver keeps his interval from the gun ahead, the centre driver looks to it that his lead horse does its share of work on the hills, and the wheel driver takes special care of the direction of his team when an infrequent corner has to be turned, for on him depends the track the wheels will make, and where they will run with relation to the middle of the road. Were there only a lead driver, the sweep taken on corners would not be wide enough, and it takes some time to get such a ponderous engine as a 75-millimetre gun out of a ditch.

The regiment of artillery comes out from barracks in one long column, perhaps—unless one battery or a greater proportion of the whole has further to travel than the batteries which take the straightest road. For, if there are two or more parallel roads leading from the point of departure

to the destination, if it is possible for any considerable part of the journey to divide up an artillery regiment into separate batteries, this is done. The civilian has no conception of the length of line on the road which an artillery regiment of ten batteries would take up, nor can one who has not experienced the dust of a military march understand what sort of cloud the last battery of ten would have to march in. The column goes out as a whole, but as soon as possible first one battery and then another turns off from the main route. If there are only two alternate routes, then each alternate battery turns off, leaving sufficient interval between the rest for the dust of one to settle before the next shall come along. If there are more than two roads, all are used, for the more a long column can be broken up into separate units for a day's march, the sooner will the units of the column reach their destination.

The fact that the larger a body of men is, the slower it moves, is one well known to military authorities, though civilians and even many military men would be prepared to dispute it. It will be seen to be incontrovertible, though, if one realises that the pace of any body of men which keeps together as one whole is the pace of the slow-

est unit, and, moreover, that when a long column is in progress, not all its units can keep exactly the same pace as the head of the column. Consequently there occur a series of checks in the body of the column; here and there crowding forward occurs, and then the units of the column concerned in the crowding have to halve in order to rectify this—or at least have to check their pace for the time. The check may travel from the centre of the column right down to its rear, and then there are gaps which have to be corrected, for when a check occurs it is always prolonged just a little too long a time—and then the head of the column has to check in order for the rear to catch up. And, the longer the column, the more of these irritating little checks there will be, with a net consequence that the column will take relatively longer to pass a given point or to arrive at a given spot.

Because of these checks, as well as to give more air and comfort to the men, in all arms of the service intervals are maintained on the march, and a column is divided up into as many separate units as possible. Infantry maintain intervals between companies, cavalry maintain intervals between squadrons, and artillery maintain intervals between batteries, while the two mounted arms split up

their columns if parallel roads are available, for the intervals do not quite compensate for the checks described, and, the smaller the units of the force can be made by means of separate roads, the shorter will be the march between two points.

CHAPTER IX

MANŒUVRES

MANŒUVRES form an expensive portion of the conscript's training, and it will be understood, when it is remembered that under ordinary peace conditions France maintains twenty military stations, each forming the skeleton of an army corps, that the annual cost to the state runs into a considerable fraction of the total military expenditure, this including the cost of food for men, forage for horses, the running of transports and stores, and all the expenses incidental to the maintenance of troops in the field. One item alone, the cost of shells fired by artillery during their annual practice, represent a large expenditure, for each shell is in itself a complicated piece of machinery, which must be perfectly accurate in all its parts, and is a costly thing to produce.

Not that the soldier on manœuvres ever counts cost; the majority of the troops do not even think of such a thing. They are out roughing it, a business which gratifies the instincts of most

healthy minded and bodied men, and one which is conducive to health and high spirits. Your conscript on manœuvres is a different being from the one who came to the colours in the previous October. He has acquired a self-confidence and self-reliance of which he was innocent at the beginning of his training; he came as a boy, but now there are about him the signs of a man, and the first camp more than anything else gives him a realisation of the value of military training from a man's own point of view, and quite apart from its value to the state. By the time the season of manœuvres is over he is a second-year man, and has begun to feel his feet.

If one takes a map of France and picks out the twenty stations of the various army corps scattered throughout the country, and then if one realises the numbers of men actually serving that these stations represent, one will see that it is quite impossible that all the army corps of the country should make a point of undergoing their manœuvres as one united body. The disturbance inflicted from a civilian point of view on the area chosen would be enormous, and the result of no more value as regards the training of officers and men than when two or three army corps conduct their mimic warfare together. Certainly more

than one army corps should be engaged in an annual set of manœuvres. For instance, if one took Lyons as the station concerned, and assumed that the army corps stationed at Lyons conducted its manœuvres year after year independently of those army corps which have their headquarters at other centres, it would be easily understood that the army corps with headquarters at Lyons would, to a certain extent, get into a rule-of-thumb way of working, and would fail to keep itself abreast of the various discoveries that are constantly being made by all sorts and conditions of commanders in the art of war. It is essential that units should as far as possible be able to interchange ideas, and learn new ways from each other, for war is a business in which, given forces of equal strength, the most intelligently controlled army wins.

The manœuvre areas of France are many. There are stretches of hill country like the district of the Vosges; forest stretches like the Ardennes in which the French Army has recently conducted some of its stiffest fights; great open plains like that which lies about Châlons, or like the Breton *Landes*; and river basins of diversified country, giving reaches of hill, valley and woodland, and most useful of all from a military educational point of view, since

they afford training in practically all branches of the soldier's work.

In average manœuvres, two forces, designated respectively as a blue and a red force, or in some way distinguished from each other by marks which enable men to tell "friend" from "enemy," are set to face each other in a certain limited area. Each force is expected to do its best to render the other ineffective as a fighting force, and the conditions are made to resemble those of real warfare as nearly as possible. It must be said, however, that up to the present, no nation in its military manœuvres has ever allowed sufficiently for casualties; as an instance may be cited the case of a regiment which, on a certain set of manœuvres in France, was surrounded and entirely put out of action early in the course of the operations. Had the business been real, the men of that particular regiment would all have been either dead or prisoners, but they were allowed to continue to count in the force to which they belonged, and the commander of the opposing force simply scored up so much credit for having achieved a brilliant military operation. Of course, from the point of view of training officers and men, for which manœuvres are specially designed, it was quite right that the officers and men of this unit should take part in the opera-

tions up to the last day, but, since men do not resurrect in this fashion after a real battle, it may be said, viewing the matter disinterestedly, that there was no further tactical value in the scheme carried out. The opposing forces were so constituted for the operation as to be of about equal strength, and the presence or absence of the regiment referred to would have been quite sufficient to turn the scale one way or the other—and yet they were allowed to take part after having been theoretically wiped out of existence! This anomalous method of procedure is not peculiar to the French Army, however, but is practically common to the armies of all nations.

The nature of the work which the conscript has to perform on manœuvres is purely a matter of luck. For instance, the force in which one is serving may be compelled, in order to carry out the scheme of its commander, to execute a wheeling or turning movement to either flank, and, supposing a wheel to the right flank is required, then the men on the right flank have very little marching to do, and very little work, since their part in the scheme is to wait for the wheeling flank to come round. An amusing old scamp whose service began when the five years' law was still in force, and who served in a French infantry battalion up

to a short time ago, used to allege that he was once right-hand man of an army corps which wheeled in this fashion with the right flank for a pivot. "I stood for three weeks," he alleged, "on that flank, waiting for the outer flank to come round, and looking up the line to see that the men kept their dressing." The "dressing," it should be explained, is a term used in both the French and British Army for the keeping of line by the men.

But, speaking seriously, these wheeling movements occur frequently during a term of manœuvres; when the business is over, and the men of the various units come to compare notes, they are often puzzled at the enormous amount of work and marching imposed on one unit, while another had practically nothing to do, and stayed very nearly in the same place throughout the whole time. For, though the part that his own regiment has to play in a scheme is usually explained to the conscript, the strategical nature of the scheme as a whole is generally beyond his comprehension. This is not to be wondered at, since a strategical scheme is planned out by the best brains of the army corps—at least, the staff officers are supposed to possess the best brains, and are given their posts mainly on account of greater fitness for the planning of military operations.

Manœuvres as a whole approximate as nearly as is possible, in view of the difference in circumstances, to active service, but "nearly as possible" is not "quite," and the lessons learned on manœuvres, valuable though they are, cannot be unreservedly applied to active service. Reference has already been made to the way in which the soldier enjoys his period of manœuvres, but no man enjoys active service in a similar fashion, and *moral*, one of the greatest deciding factors in war, is entirely absent from the mimic warfare in which armies engage in time of peace. At the same time the lessons learned from manœuvres are as valuable as they are varied. Commanding officers learn the amount of strain which they can impose on their men; the conditions under which transport can and must be brought up for the use of the troops can be studied with almost as much accuracy as in warfare; the cavalry commander learns the value, from a war point of view, of his men as scouts and on detached duties, while the artillery officer finds out, as he never could without manœuvre experience, the possibilities of gun transport, and the business of ranging positions with a view to rendering them untenable by shell-fire. Where the manœuvre period fails as regards war lies mainly in the absence of disadvantages.

As already remarked, the conditions under which transport can be brought up for the use of troops can be studied, but sometimes in war transport goes wrong, or gets captured, and an army has to do its best to keep the field until supplementary supplies can be obtained; manœuvres never impose this form of disability on the troops. The cavalry commander is unable to ascertain what his men would do when actually under fire, and though artillery officers learn to range a position, they are unable to judge what the troops occupying that position will be like after shelling has been carried out. Manœuvres teach up to a point, but from that point the art of war can be learned only from the grim business itself, and, since no two bodies of troops are ever in the same frame of mind, and no two battles are fought under identical conditions, the art of war is never learned, simple though its principles are.

The average conscript is troubled little about such matters as these. As an infantryman, his business is to entrench himself when ordered to do so; to advance by short rushes, squad alternating with squad, during the work of getting nearer the enemy; to charge if bidden, or to retreat as he advanced, in the way that would produce least damage to the force of which he is a member if that force

were exposed to actual fire. Both in infantry and cavalry there exists a prejudice against firing the first blank cartridge of a manœuvre day, though, once that first cartridge has been fired, a man does not care how many more he fires, and often men have been known to beg blank cartridges from others, after firing their own. The reason for the prejudice consists in the fact that the firing of the first cartridge fouls the barrel of the rifle and renders necessary far more thorough cleaning at the end of the day than would be required if the rifle had not been fired. But, no matter how many more cartridges may be fired through the same rifle, they cannot make the fouling of the barrel any worse, and once the fouling has been incurred, there is a certain amount of fun in blazing off blank cartridges at the "enemy."

The work of the cavalry is considerably more varied than that of the infantry. Charges, which form the culminating point of cavalry training at drill, are infrequently indulged in on manœuvres, for even in actual warfare, apart from the fact that the quick fire of modern rifles has rendered the charge a rare thing, the conditions imposed by the selection of infantry and artillery posts do not often admit of a definite cavalry charge, owing to the nature of the ground to be covered.

During manœuvres the chief value of cavalry lies in their ability to act as mounted infantry; that is, they are able to concentrate fire rapidly on a given point, and to get near that point more quickly than infantry, thus rendering their fire decisive. Further, small bodies of cavalry are employed in reconnaissance and detached duties of various kinds; the modern army in movement always throws out well to the front a screen of cavalry, whose object is to find and report on the presence of the enemy, to maintain contact with him, but not to engage in decisive action, which is as a rule, and practically always when the opposing forces are of equal strength, left mainly to the artillery and infantry following on behind the cavalry screen. During a period of manœuvres cavalry patrols theoretically cut telegraph wires, destroy bridges, and do all they can to impede the progress of the advancing enemy. Sometimes small parties of scouts are sent out to get on to the enemy's lines of communication, and, if possible, cut them. An army with its line of communication cut is in practice like a man with his windpipe severed, and thus it will be understood that if cavalry perform this business effectively, their value to the force to which they belong is enormous. This, however, is more true of manœuvres than of war, for in the

latter communications are so well guarded that as a rule it takes a stronger force than a body of cavalry unsupported by artillery to get on to a line of communication with a view to damaging it.

Mention has already been made of the prejudice which the infantryman has against firing the first blank cartridge of the day. Since this is the case where the rifle is concerned, one may guess what the artilleryman's feelings are like when his gun has to fire the first shot, for the cleaning of a field-gun, even after firing blank ammunition, is no light matter. The bore of the gun has literally to be scrubbed out in order to remove the fouling, and the gunner's task is not an enviable one; the clothing of the first-year conscript, when the gun has been cleaned after firing, looks as if the man had been hauled up a chimney by his heels, and though men keep a special suit of fatigue clothes for use on this task, they like it none the more for that.

In addition to the ordinary manœuvre period in which cavalry and infantry participate, artillery units go every year to a practice camp which is a special area set apart for the firing of live shells, with a view to giving officers and men alike training in the realities of their work. The so-called smokeless powder—which in reality is not smokeless—used on these occasions, together with the passage

of a shell through the rifling of the gun, renders the cleaning of the bore an even more messy business than that incurred in firing blank ammunition during tactical exercises. Drivers and gunners alike generally enjoy their time at practice camp, but the gunners use language over cleaning the guns, and with good cause too, when one considers the nature and difficulty of the task.

But, whether the occasion be that of practice camp for the artillery, or tactical exercise for the three arms, there is more to enjoy than to cavil at. Manœuvres come at the best period of the year, from the weather point of view; the days are warm, but not too warm, and the cool nights induce healthy sleep. There is plenty of food, generally a sufficiency of tobacco and cigarettes, and the canteen travels with the men. There is a pleasant uncertainty about the nature of the day's work and the length of time it will take; one may be out until late in the evening, or one may finish in the afternoon, and, after an inspection of arms, be at liberty to go to the canteen and discuss things in general with one's comrades, or with the men who, coming from other stations, have new stories to tell and new matters to discuss. One may, granted the necessary leave, walk over to a near-by town, where is certain to be at least a cinema hall, and restau-

rants outside which one may sit by a table at the pavement edge and view civilian life. Or there may be a night march to be accomplished, and, though this is a tiring business, it has a certain amount of interest as long as the weather holds good. The chief drawback to manœuvres is a rainy season, when the soldier has a particularly unenviable time of it. There are seldom sufficient fires at which to dry one's clothes; there is, perhaps, the business of pitching tents in the rain, and then the crowding of self, arms, and equipment into the canvas shelter, while outside the rain keeps on in a way which suggests that fine days are things of the past, never to be experienced again. The infantry go squelching out from camp in the morning; the cavalry pull up their wet lines and, getting mounted, splash out through mud puddles, while the artillery drivers harness up their horses with a knowledge that a hard day is in store for them, both on the road, where their horses will be overtaxed by the heavy going, and in camp, where the cleaning of wet saddlery and equipment and the grooming of muddy horses is enough to spoil temper at the end of the day's work. And the transport waggons, standing parked in the rain, look as if they were used for the carriage of materialised despair, and had been abandoned because the

loads were too heavy. A wet town or village is a dreary sight, but a wet camp is the most depressing thing on earth.

Even in wet weather, however, the spirit of the conscript is usually proof against depression. There are compensations: for one thing, work is lightened as far as possible, and usually the operations of the manœuvres are modified in case of a continual spell of wet weather, for it is not only the men who suffer from adverse climatic conditions, and it is not the business of a period of manœuvres to impose too great a strain on the forces taking part therein. When the men are in their tents and the rain is driving down outside, the interminable songs of the army may be heard from the interiors of the tents. Even in a standing camp—that is to say, a camp located in one position for a period of several days—the men are made to undergo a certain number of parades in order to keep them in health, for continued idleness in camp almost certainly means disease, and, as has already been remarked, the authorities of the French Army are fully alive to the necessity for preserving the health of the men.

On the average, manœuvre days are fine days; a spell of wet weather is exceptional, for the season of the year is chosen, in some degree, with a view

to imparting as much instruction to officers and men alike as is possible in the allotted period. Given fine weather, one has to work—but then, one has to work in barracks, and not in such congenial fashion as in this life of open air and comparative freedom.

As the end of the manœuvre period approaches, the second-year men get more and more excited, for your Frenchman, whether as conscript or civilian, is an excitable person, and not ashamed of showing his feelings as is the man west of the Channel. For these second-year men civilian life is getting very near. Pierre will go back to the farm, and Jacques will return to his place behind the counter, while Jean will once more polish the seat of the office stool for a stated period each day. But Jacques and Pierre and Jean will at times look back to the good days and the cheery comrades of the last manœuvres, and perhaps, although this is a conscript army, they will know a transient regret in that they will never again go out from the barrack gate as units of a column setting out on the long march.

CHAPTER X

WITH THE CAVALRY SCOUTS

THE incidents related in this chapter took place a few years back during a certain manœuvre season, and for obvious reasons it is impossible to indicate the men, forces concerned, or locality more closely than that. The forces concerned were an army corps advancing from the south, and one advancing from the north, toward each other, with a view to trying conclusions under manœuvre conditions. The story concerns scouts of the blue force, advancing from the north—it was one of these scouts of the blue force who told the story. It must not be taken as a typical story of army life, for the circumstances under which these men were placed were exceptional, agreeably so; it is, however, sufficiently typical for relation, in that it embodies things actually accomplished by soldiers of the Army of the Republic. Like most things that happen both in manœuvres and in war, it could never happen again.

The blue force, with at least fifty miles to go after leaving barracks, knew that the red force would

have further to travel, since the limits of the manœuvre area were clearly marked out on maps supplied to the officers taking part, and each force knew from what garrison the force opposing it was coming. Beyond this, though, neither officers nor men of the blue force knew from what direction the "reds" would attack, and the composition and strength of each arm of the "reds" was for the "blues" to find out; that is what cavalry patrols and scouting parties are for: to ascertain the strength and disposition of the enemy; and, in order to make the manœuvres as much like real war as possible, each side was kept in ignorance, as far as might be, of the movements of the other.

There were two days of steady marching, through days that were not too warm and nights that were decidedly cold. Marching in column, this business, with plenty of dust along the roads and the squadrons closed up so that one's horse's nose was not far from the tail of the horse in the next rank. In the cool weather the horses travelled well, and the cavalry got into camp fairly early in the afternoon, when the bivouacs were made and the men rested and ate, after seeing to the needs of their horses. Late in the afternoon of the second day a canvas town came into view after the troops had passed over a small river, and here the regiments went into

camp. At twelve o'clock that night the manœuvre period was to start, and no action of any kind bearing on the actual manœuvres might be undertaken until midnight had passed, though commanders might make their plans and allot their units and men to the various parts they intended the latter to play in the struggle for points in the game. The troops themselves looked forward to an exciting time: in the blue army, every man knew that he was to capture a "red" if the chance came his way; he must act as in real war, except that the cartridges would be blank and the business would be one of sport with the grimness of war left out.

In a certain regiment of chasseurs which formed part of the blue army, Lieutenant Lenoir received his orders with regard to special reconnaissance duty, and, acting on these orders, he gathered together Corporal Jean and Trooper Jacques, both qualified as signallers, whose first names will serve for the purposes of this narrative. He also collected from their respective troops certain men more than usually efficient in scouting duty, known respectively as Pierre and Guillaumette—or little Billy—from one *peloton*, Henri and l'Anglais (the latter from his English way of drinking beer when he could get it, a trick acquired in his native Lorraine, though his fellows gave him his nickname because of it, and

from another *peloton* more good men to the number of four). Lenoir would have liked to take more, but he knew that for the success of the plan with which he was entrusted a small body of men would get through with less chance of being seen—the smaller the better, down to a certain point. So he took the minimum possible. They obeyed the rules of the game thoroughly, for it was not until the stroke of twelve that the men were given permission to saddle up; all they knew at that time was that they were going out on detachment duty of some kind, away from the army itself, and that was enough for them. Detachment duty is always welcome, and Lenoir had a reputation among the men of being one of the best officers in the regiment, although a very quiet man, comparatively speaking.

The men were a good crowd, too. The signallers knew their work thoroughly and were keen soldiers; the scouts chosen were men who took actual pleasure in solving problems of country, second-year and re-engaged men, who took soldiering seriously and enjoyed work like this. Altogether it was a very contented and very keen little party that set out from the camp a quarter of an hour after midnight, with Lenoir leading into the black and rainy night that came on them as they rode. They went steadily on for some time—it was three in the

morning when Lenoir halted his men under shelter of a tree that branched out over their road and told them the object of their journey. He explained, by the aid of the map, what they were expected to do.

The line of country that would be chosen by the "reds" had been carefully calculated: the commander of the "blues" had estimated that, with a view to avoiding rivers and hills, and keeping to open ground, the commander of the red army would bring up his men—or, at least, most of them—by the western side of the manœuvre area, leaving a large stretch of country unoccupied to the east. It was the business of this patrol to go down by way of the eastern boundary of the manœuvre area, get on to the "reds" line of communication, and cut it, thus preventing (in theory) the sending up of stores, and (also in theory) reducing the red force to such a state as regards stores and ammunition that it would be forced (once more in theory) to surrender. The scheme bespeaks the way in which modern military plans are thought out, and how one calculates on probabilities. The "blue" commander assumed that such a course as bringing the men up the western side would be adopted by the commander of the "reds": he was not certain of it, but assumed it to such an extent that he con-

sidered it worth while to waste a cavalry patrol on it; supposing he were wrong, then he only lost half a dozen men or so and one officer from his effectives; supposing, on the other hand, that he were right, he would have accomplished a movement that would render ineffective anything his "enemy" might do.

It was their business, Lenoir explained, to get quite down to the southern limit of the manœuvre area, so as to cut the line as nearly as possible to neutral ground, for the further back they got the less likelihood there would be of encountering any strong force left for the purpose of protecting the line. They were to ride warily, avoid hills, and keep in hollows, and at the same time they were to keep an eye out for any bodies of troops that they might see. Their business was to run from everybody whom they might see during the following day, for it would not do to risk the capture or loss of a man while on the journey; every man would be needed at the journey's end.

All this was explained by the aid of the map, and, realising the importance of their mission, the men were more keen than ever over its fulfilment. They mounted again and rode on, Lenoir always leading; at times he halted them that he might consult his map with the help of an electric torch

where two roads branched, or where there was any uncertainty about their direction. The rain passed off; the stars came out and paled as dawn grew; they halted in the grey of early daybreak down under the shelter of a hill. Before them was a tiny valley through which a stream flowed, and beyond an unbroken range of other hills of which the crests showed no signs of human occupation. A short distance along the way they had come was a farmhouse built into a nook of the hills, while open country marked the way ahead, beyond the base of the hill under which they had camped. They gave their horses water at the stream, and, since Lenoir said they would halt there for nearly two hours to rest the horses, they got out their own food, after feeding their mounts, but did not off-saddle or remove any equipment, for the men as well as their officer knew that they were parallel now with the enemy's force.

Jacques and l'Anglais went out to collect firewood, for they thought it worth while to make coffee during their halt. These two passed well out of sight of the rest round the base of the hill, and walked suddenly and unsuspectingly on to two of the scouts of the enemy's force, who, being a little more quick than either Jacques or l'Anglais, informed them that they were prisoners and must

come with them. Jacques, however, temporised; he pointed out to these scouts of the "reds" that he and his companion were, like their captors, mounted men, and they certainly could not walk and leave their horses to break loose and perhaps damage themselves. They had tied their horses up round the corner, said Jacques, and if their captors would only come with them they would get the animals and follow as prisoners without trouble. The two "reds" hesitated a bit, but finally saw reason in this, and, thinking that their two prisoners were quite alone, followed without dismounting round to where the horses were supposed to be tied. So well was Lenoir's little camp located that the two "reds" followed Jacques and l'Anglais almost into it before they perceived that they were in the vicinity of a force far stronger than their two selves. When they grasped the situation fully, they put spurs to their mounts, turned, and fled. Jacques grabbed at the bridle rein of one, but missed, and l'Anglais was so lucky as to secure the helmet of the other man, which he tied to his saddle by way of a trophy. The two "reds," who were well mounted, went off round the base of the hill and vanished; apparently they formed a patrol on the extreme flank of the red force, for no other

men appeared to reinforce or replace them while the little party of "blues" remained halted.

The men of the blue patrol got their firewood and made coffee, which at that hour of the morning was more to them than food. More quickly than he had at first intended Lenoir bade them tighten girths and mount, for he feared lest the patrol which they had encountered would carry news of their presence, and bring down on them a greater force from which it might be impossible to escape.

Through the early hours of the day they rode, sometimes on roads, sometimes across country. The average of their course took them over two miniature mountain ranges, and on the second of these little hill ranges they saw, very far off, a body of cavalry advancing across country. Corporal Jean, together with Jacques, got down from their horses and set up a heliograph, with which they tried to "call up" the troops away on the plain. They could get only fragmentary answers from the other people's heliographs; Lenoir sat on his horse beside them and waited for a coherent message, but evidently the cavalry force would not trust them, nor reveal its own identity, for all Jean could get out of it, after persistent calling up, was the query, "Who are you?"

"Don't tell them," said Lenoir, "but ask them that yourself."

This Jean had already done, but he tried it again with no better result than before. By this time they could see that the cavalry signallers who had stopped to answer them were getting left far behind by their main body, and Jean, finding that he could get no satisfaction out of them, packed up his own heliograph and mounted again. They went on down the hill into a shallow valley through which flowed another little river. At the foot of the hills they halted, and Guillaumette went back on foot to the top of the hill to keep guard while the others rested. After half an hour one of the others relieved him from this duty, and both men reported that the country all round was clear of enemies, or friends. This was as Lenoir had anticipated, for he had judged by this time they would be well behind the main body of the advancing red force.

They made of this a long halt for the sake of their horses, which had already done the equivalent of a day's work. It was late in the afternoon, and the power of the sun had almost gone, when they slung their saddles on their horses again, and girthed up. The valley through which the little river flowed lay level before them for miles, and

they rode down it toward where a curve of the hills on either side prevented sight of their destination. That curve seemed ever to recede as they rode, and the sun dropped over the crests of the western hills, leaving the men chilled and tired. By order of Lenoir, who set the example, they dismounted and trudged on, leading their horses—all save l'Anglais, who left his reins on his horse's neck and trusted to the animal to follow him. L'Anglais and his horse were good friends.

Dusk fell on them as they mounted again; on their left the little river had been companion of their journey since leaving the last range of hills, but now they turned away to the right and ascended slightly from the valley. Suddenly the ground fell away from before them, and they went down past three houses to a railway station and goods yard, in which stacks of forage and other stores, covered by waterproof sheets, lay with only one man to guard them, one who was unsuspecting of surprise and easily captured. Lenoir left here all his men with the exception of Pierre and l'Anglais, and these he took with him away out to the other side of the village. Beyond the houses the officer and his two men sat down on the ground, waiting. At last the moon rose, and they espied a tent almost concealed among trees. Within the tent they found

a corporal and a squad of men belonging to a squadron of train, all asleep. Lenoir wakened the corporal and informed him that he and all his party were captured, and that the stores under their charge were subject to the orders of the officer commanding the blue army.

That was the end of the task. With his little squad of scouts Lenoir had captured the unguarded stores of the red force, and had thus rendered ineffective anything that they might accomplish in the matter of field operations. Theoretically the red force was beaten on its first day in the field, but in actual fact the stores went up from the captured base to the red army, as if no capture had been accomplished, for it would not do to go to the expense of moving out two army corps from barracks for the purpose of manœuvres, and then cancelling the manœuvres because a cavalry patrol had, by means of hard riding and good cross-country judgment, achieved a theoretical victory. Practice has shown that in real war a chance for such an achievement as that of Lenoir's patrol does not occur in one out of a thousand situations, and in actual war, also, no commander would be so foolish as to leave his chief supplies in charge of a corporal and squad of men of a squadron of train.

Adequate protection is always afforded to lines of communication by an attacking force in war.

The incident is noteworthy, however, in that it affords an example of the way in which military plans are thought out. The commander responsible for the conception of Lenoir's mission judged exactly what line of country would be clear for such an advance. He could not know whether or no his judgment would be at fault, but he saw that the plan was worth the risk of an officer and a dozen or so of men, whose absence would not materially weaken his force. Some slight psychological knowledge must have been his as well, for even on manœuvres a commanding officer usually protects his lines of communication, and the base from which his stores are sent, more effectually than did this red commander. Again, the way in which Lenoir chose his men is noteworthy. He picked the best scouts from the squadron to which he belonged; possibly, had he chosen to look throughout the whole regiment, he might have obtained even better men to accompany him, but he chose men whom he knew to be good riders, careful of their horses, and able to undergo a long march. The two signallers represented a minimum that he must take if he wished to send or receive messages to or from any other force. As a matter of fact

nothing occurred to render it necessary that any individual scout should be placed in a position where the exercise of initiative would be an essential; neither were the signallers called on for special exertions, or for the full exercise of their special department of knowledge, but they might have been. Lenoir chose his men with a view to compressing the greatest possible effectiveness into the smallest number compatible with the accomplishment of his mission. He chose them also with a view, not to what they actually did as individuals, but with a view of the demands that might have been made on them. As the affair turned out, they simply had a quietly good time in this "base" village until the manœuvres concluded; Lenoir saw to it that the horses received all necessary attention, and for the rest he left his men to their own devices. And one may trust a soldier, either conscript or volunteer, to make life worth living when given such a chance as this.

It was a week or more before the scout of the red force got his helmet back. He met l'Anglais by appointment in the canteen devoted to the use of the blue cavalry, and received back the headgear undamaged. It may be said in conclusion that he compensated l'Anglais in the usual fashion—and any soldier will know what that means.

CHAPTER XI

INTERNAL ECONOMY

IF one should take the trouble to enquire of the chef at any leading hotel as to whether he had undergone military service as a conscript, the answer would in nineteen cases out of twenty be in the affirmative, and probably the full nineteen out of every twenty would also reply in the affirmative if asked whether they were Frenchmen. It would be enlightening for the average Englishman to make such enquiries, for by that means he would realise to a far greater extent than in any other way, the universality of the French Army. Comprehension of the fact that virtually every man of the French nation is capable of taking his place in the ranks of some regiment without undergoing some form of preliminary training, is impossible to the English mind until concrete examples of the effect of this are confronted.

The point with regard to the chefs is in connection with the way in which the French Army has its food cooked and served. The *pantalon rouge*

lives well, for cooking is an art indigenous to France, and the very best cooks of France practise their art on their comrades of the barrack-room, while there are few companies or squadrons in the French Army that do not contain at least one professional chef. The British Army suffers at times from monotonous menus, "stews" alternating with "roast" until a meat-pie would be a joy, and any variety of diet would be welcome. But in the French Army, given materials corresponding in any way to the needs of the soldier, there is no lack of variety in the food. There are two ways of cooking a potato in the British Army to twenty in the French service; the British soldiers get eggs served in two or three ways, but the conscript cook of the French Army can cook an egg in a way that disguises it to such an extent that a hen would disown it—and there are many ways of doing this. Soup precedes the more solid course of the French soldier's meal, and there are savoury dishes and concoctions which to the British soldier would be but mystery. The French cook is an artist at all times, and his art is no less evident during his conscript days than before and after.

Sweet dishes are rare, and the taste of the soldier lies more in the matter of savouries. In addition to the regular provisions made for the troops, there

are many men, who, in their spare time, cook dishes to suit their own fancies. The "messing allowance" of the British service is a thing unknown, for the French soldier's limited pay is pay pure and simple, and is not sufficient in amount to admit of deductions of this nature. Much is often made of the fact that the rate of pay in the British Army is far higher than that of any conscript force, but against this it must be said that, so far as the French conscript is concerned, the Government provides in kind for practically all his necessities, leaving the total of his pay—small as that is—as his own pocket money. The bread ration, for instance, is larger in the French than in the British Army, and the French Government provides, free of cost, all necessary articles for a varied and nutrient diet. The sergeants in the French Army contribute to a slight extent toward the cost of their messing, but then it must be borne in mind that all non-commissioned officers of the French Army are re-engaged men on a considerably higher rate of pay than that allowed to a conscript during his first two years. Among the rank and file, mess books are kept for the companies or squadrons of each unit, and usually these mess books are placed in the hands of corporals, who eat with the men, and thus benefit from their own good judgment

in the matter of choosing provisions to the value allowed by the mess book, and equally they suffer for their own mistakes.

With a view to the possible disorganisation under war conditions of arrangements for cooking food by the company or squadron, the French soldier is taught and encouraged to cook and prepare his own food on the field. During the manœuvre period, the arrival of French troops in camp is marked by the lighting of fires, at which men cook their own food, and officers supervise this business in order to make certain that no man goes to sleep for the night without having first had a sufficiently sustaining meal. Within a quarter of an hour of the arrival of an infantry regiment in camp, the kettles are boiling and the coffee is made; the slabs of compressed soup, which form a feature of the culinary service of the army, are broken up and dissolved, and bread and meat are issued to form the solid part of the day's meal. Motor-driven vans travel with the army, filled with quarters of fresh meat hung in dust-proof compartments; these travelling meat safes form a recent innovation, and have been found thoroughly satisfactory in that they increase the fresh food supplies of the troops.

A point worthy of note in connection with the arrangements for the supply of food is that in the

French Army the principal meal of the day falls at the end of the day's work, both in barracks and in camp. In the British service the principal meal is taken at midday, with the result that, so far as official meals are concerned, the soldier gets nothing but a light tea between the dinner of one day and the breakfast of the next, and he has to buy his own supper to compensate for this. In the French Army men are provided with coffee before turning out for the first parade in the morning; at ten o'clock soup is served; at two o'clock or thereabouts, according to the nature of work on which men are engaged, another light meal is provided, and then with the end of the day comes a two or three course meal which corresponds in quantity and nutrient value—though not in the manner of its cooking—to the midday dinner of the British soldier. By this means the French soldier is relieved of the necessity of buying any supper, and his official rations of food are, in the majority of cases, amply sufficient for his needs without his having recourse to his own pocket.

Although, as has been stated, the mess books are controlled by corporals, this by no means forms the total of the supervision entailed on French military cooking and provisions. The senior officers of the regiment are especially charged with the super-

vision of these details of internal economy; the officer of the week is a frequent visitor of the cook-houses of his regiment, and surprise visits are made to the dining-tables of the men in order to make sure that no cause for complaint exists with regard to the quantity or quality of provisions supplied. The adjutants also are concerned in the efficiency of the cooks, and the provision of proper meals for the non-commissioned officers, while, since these latter have a share in paying for the goods supplied, they have also a voice in matters of choice and cookery. On the whole, bearing in mind the quality of French cookery and the fact that that cookery is as much in evidence in the French Army as out of it, it may be said that the French soldier fares rather better than the man serving in the British Army in this all-important matter of food and its preparation.

In other matters of internal economy, officers manifest an unceasing interest in the well-being and comfort of their men. The canteens of the French Army are under the direct supervision of senior officers, and thus such supplies as men may purchase individually in the way of food, drink, or cleaning materials, are always up to the required standard of quality. The matter of laundrywork is also in the care of officers of the various regiments,

and altogether the comfort and well-being of the men are matters for which officers are held responsible to a greater extent than in the British service, where, with regards to some things, departments rather than men are made responsible.

The conduct of drill and routine, directly under the supervision of the commanding officer of each regiment, are managed differently from drill and routine in the British service. For instance, British soldiers go out to drill for an hour, and at the conclusion of that hour, whatever has happened, the parade is dismissed; the French squad turns out for drill nominally for an hour—assuming that as the period taken for illustration—but in reality the drill lasts until the superiors are satisfied that the men have done what they set out to do. Stereotype is not compatible with the methods of the French Army, but efficiency counts before set rules, and the object of training is always efficiency, without regard to former practices. Slaves to custom do not exist; custom itself does not exist, except in so far as it is essential to the performance of duties, and the maintenance of efficiency.

It should be borne in mind that this difference in the ways of two armies, French and English, is rendered necessary by the basis on which the armies are founded. The British Army is based on

a voluntary system, and the lowest stated period of service is three years. The French Army is based on conscription, which does away with all idea of selection, and the stated period during which men can be compelled to train is two years only—or rather it was two years only up to a short time before the army changed from peace strength and conditions to a war footing. Under the two years' system, men must be kept at work all the time in order to teach them the whole of their work; drill and fatigues alternate, and there are but short intervals between; one of the rules of the French Army is that the conscript shall be made to work all the time, and another rule that must be borne in mind in connection with this is that each man shall be provided with sufficient food of a suitable nature to enable him to do his work, at no cost to himself.

The rules of the army provide that during all manœuvre periods conscripts shall endure active service conditions. Pipeclay and polish disappear, and no "parade movements" are indulged in. There are no stage effects, and a cavalry leader who on manœuvres indulged his men in a charge that would not be really useful under war conditions would get a severe reprimand, if not a more substantial punishment. All unnecessary show is condemned, and

the French Army on manœuvres is made to understand that its work is genuine preparation for the rough business of active service. Another point worthy of note is that, during manœuvre periods, full use is made of all available buildings for purposes of sleep and shelter, just as would be done in time of war, and straw is used to supplement the coverings carried, when the nights are cold. The bulky and ungainly-looking great-coat of the French soldier is practically sufficient for covering when in camp, since it is extremely warm, and is manufactured from a porous class of material which swells and becomes waterproof in even a slight shower. It has been long since realised in the French Army that individual comfort makes for collective efficiency, and, though discipline is exceedingly strict, yet this is counterbalanced by the way in which the well-being of the men is studied.

To each regiment two doctors are allotted, and the medical service of the French Army as a whole, though only a modern growth, is equal to that of any other continental nation. The French Red Cross Society is but little more than forty years old, but the facility with which the nation as a whole, adopts and adapts all things to its use, has been well manifested here, for the Red Cross service of the French Army gives place to none in the

matter of efficiency. In such a time as the present, when every resource of the nation is strained in coping with a ruthless invader, it is only to be expected that medical provision will at times be found hardly or only just adequate for unprecedented demands, but the medical service for the army has risen to the occasion in just as heroic fashion as has the nation as a whole.

In the matter of making each regiment as self-contained as possible, the French Army is about equal with the British. In a French regiment, signallers, scouts, and others are trained from the ranks of the regiment itself to undertake the special duties imposed on each of these branches of military activity. In the matter of scouting, and in such things as taking cover, trench-digging, the use of extended formations, etc., the French Army has benefited largely by the British war in South Africa, of which the lessons were studied quite as keenly as in the British Army itself, and the training of men was modified on experience thus gained by others. Again, French officers attached to the Russian and Japanese staff in the Russo-Japanese war brought back much practical knowledge which was applied in their own army, more especially with regard to fortifications, defensive positions, siege warfare, and the work of armies in close contact

and in large masses. It may be said as a whole, with regard to the working of the army, that France has never hesitated to adapt the lessons taught by others to her own use, while there can be no doubt that the lessons learned from the failure of such armies as Napoleon the futile forced into action in 1870 have been taken to heart and applied, with a view to fitness for the struggle that is not yet ended.

CHAPTER XII

SOME INCIDENTALS

THE subject of disciplinary battalions is not a pleasant one in the opinion of the French soldier, but the formation of such battalions is a necessity in the conscript army of a nation which demands military service of all its citizens. For in such an army the criminal classes and bad characters are included with the rest, and, if they do not conform to military rules in a better way than they submit to the ordinary restrictions imposed on any law-abiding civil community, then some form of discipline must be adopted in order to coerce them. When the regimental authorities of any unit in the French Army have ascertained, by the repeated application of ordinary corrective methods, that it is impossible to make an efficient soldier of any man in the unit in question, the man concerned is taken before the *conseil de discipline*, which has power to recommend that he should be sent to service in the disciplinary battalion stationed in Algeria.

The *conseil* consists of a major as president, together with the two senior captains and two senior lieutenants of the regiment to which the man belongs, exclusive of his own squadron or company officer. The case against the man is presented by the senior officer of the squadron or company to which the man belongs; this evidence for the prosecution having been taken, the prosecuting officer retires, and the accused man is brought in to make his defence. Then the court, after due deliberation, makes its report, recommending either that the man shall be given another chance in the regiment, or sent to a disciplinary battalion. The report is then sent to the colonel of the regiment, who either endorses or rejects the decision of the court. Should his decision be favourable to the accused, the man is given another chance, but if, on the other hand, he endorses the recommendation of the court, the sanction of the general commanding the station is required in order to complete the proceedings. With this sanction the offender is sent to Algeria, where the disciplinary battalions are known as "Biribi" and are stationed on the most advanced posts of this French colony. Owing to their shaven heads, the men in these battalions are known as *têtes des veaux*, and their release from this form of service is entirely de-

pendent on their own conduct. In one historic case, the son of a general served four years as a private in one of these battalions, which include, in addition to men of a distinctively criminal type, a number of social wrecks. A disciplinary battalion is a veritable lost legion.

Some years ago one of these battalions was on the march from Biskra in Southern Algeria, and on the march one unscrupulous ruffian, who cherished a grudge against the major commanding, fell back to the rear of the column, pretending to be ill. He feigned greater and yet greater exhaustion, and at last sat down as if unable to march further. The major came up and inquired kindly what was the matter, and on the soldier stating that he felt too exhausted to march, the major handed him a brandy flask, from which the man took a drink. As the major was occupied in returning the flask to his saddle wallet, the soldier fired his rifle at him, but fortunately missed, owing to the swerving of the officer's horse. At this the major realised with what a dangerous class of man he had to deal, and, drawing his revolver, he blew the man's brains out. Some time later another officer of the same battalion found a stone placed on the spot commemorating the memory of the soldier criminal; the stone was removed, but was replaced; six times in

succession this was done, and yet it was never ascertained who was responsible for cutting inscriptions on the stones, or placing them there.

A very common mistake is made in confusing the disciplinary battalions of the Algerian frontier with the world-famous Foreign Legion of the French Army, and consequently the Foreign Legion has gained an undeserved reputation for iron discipline and unduly harsh treatment of its men. The chief disabilities attendant on service in the Foreign Legion consist in periods of service in some of the peculiarly unhealthy localities included in French colonial possessions. The Foreign Legion suffered more than any other unit of the French service during its period of active service in French Cochin-China, while inland in Algeria its members are subjected to a peculiarly trying climate, and in other parts of French Africa the Foreign Legion does duty in company with a considerable amount of epidemic disease.

Service in the Foreign Legion is, of course, a voluntary matter, and the fact that the Legion is always up to strength is sufficient evidence of methods adopted with regard to the discipline of the men and the treatment accorded to them. For, although the Legion itself is famous, its individual members are not, and it cannot be said to offer any

conspicuous attractions to intending candidates for admission. It is probably the most cosmopolitan body of men in any part of the world, and the formation of such a body, in which the distinctions of nationality are abolished, is peculiar to the French nation. The Legion includes natives of every country populated by the Caucasian races, and especially of Italian, German, English, and French citizens. It is an agglomeration of adventurers, of whom the largest proportion desire only obscurity; it may be said that the Legion is made up of the bad bargains of half a world, but it is good fighting material, for all that. Ouida has drawn a highly coloured picture of service in the Foreign Legion in the book "Under Two Flags," but this picture consists mainly of romance with the soldiering left out, while actual service with the Legion involves soldiering with the romance left out. Hard soldiering, in various climates and under many conditions; in company with various kinds of men, of whom one never asks details of past history; one is accepted in the Legion for present soldierly qualities, and by tacit agreement the past is given the place allotted to most sleeping dogs. The period of service in the Legion has the merit of being intensely interesting to any man who, consciously or unconsciously, is a student of

the psychology of his fellows. The Legion itself affords instances of devotion and self-denial as heroic as any that Ouida has penned, but it may be said here with regard not only to the Foreign Legion, but to all the armies of all the world, that such systematic persecution on the part of an individual officer toward any individual man as Ouida has pictured in "Under Two Flags" is a rank impossibility. The system of decentralisation of command, of interlinking authority and supervision, and of central control by heads of units, renders impossible the persistent gratification of spite by an individual officer against an individual soldier.

In this connection, stories of persecution of individuals who have done nothing to merit the punishment inflicted on them, especially in military service, should always be accepted with the proverbial grain of salt. For there is never smoke without fire, and the man who is unpopular with all his officers and non-commissioned officers to such an extent as to incur a succession of punishments is usually deserving of all that he gets. Humanity is so constituted that sympathy almost invariably goes to the individual who is at variance with the mass, and in the exercise of sympathy one is apt to overlook the qualities and characteristics of the object on which it is bestowed. We hear,

usually, the story of the man who considers himself aggrieved or unjustly punished, and, without listening to the other side of the case, we immediately conclude that his statements are correct in all their details. As a rule, the man who thus attempts to secure a reversal of the decision against him has some inherent quality which makes for unpopularity. He is inclined to curry favour, which renders him a marked man among his comrades, or he commits acts against discipline in such a way that, although it is practically certain that he is the offender, the evidence against him is insufficient to warrant punishment. These and other characteristics of the man concerned bring heavy punishment on him when is finally caught, and, although the punishment is perfectly just, the offender immediately whines over it in such a clever way that sympathising outsiders accord him far more consideration than he deserves, and consider that his just judges have been inhuman brutes, though they merely fulfilled their duty. The offender makes sufficient fuss to be heard, but the individual or body of individuals who ordered his punishment are not able to advertise themselves in similar fashion, and thus a one-sided view is taken.

To return to the Foreign Legion, it may be said

that any attempt to quote incidents typical of its members and their ways would be quite useless, for there is in the Legion sufficient material to furnish all the novelists of this and the next century with plots to keep them busy. To outward seeming the soldiers of the Foreign Legion are average men, engaged in average military duties, and it is not until definite contact with them has been established that any realisation of their exceptional qualities and curious defects can be obtained. As is well known, the Legion includes every class of adventurers from men of royal blood and noblemen of the highest rank downward, and many an assumed name conceals a story which would be worth untold gold in Fleet Street, or in the journalistic equivalent of Fleet Street in some other European capital.

It is not generally realised in this country that the extent of the French colonies is such as to necessitate the maintenance of a considerable body of colonial troops. With the exception of the troops stationed in Algeria and Tunis, service in the French colonies is a voluntary matter; the natives of the various French dependencies have been induced to accept military service on a voluntary basis to a considerable extent. In addition to the famous Algerian Turcos, battalions of Senegalese troops

have been formed with excellent results; it has been found that the natives of this dependency make good soldiers, particularly suited to service in the interior of Africa, owing to their immunity from diseases which render tracts of country almost impenetrable to white troops. The numbers of native colonial troops given in Chapter I are constantly and steadily increasing, for, in addition to making good soldiers, the natives of French dependencies come forward readily and in increasing numbers to recruiting centres.

As regards the regular army, matters have been much better with reference to discipline and punishment since the system which permitted of *volontaires* was abolished. The *volontaires* were men who, on payment of a certain sum to the State, were permitted to compress their military training into the space of one year. The payment of this sum was supposed to guarantee a certain amount of social standing in civil life, and the *volontaires* were always regarded theoretically as a possible source from which to promote officers in case of need. In practice, however, the experiment worked out quite differently. The *volontaires* were found to be men of varying grades in life, with varying degrees of education, and equally varying mental qualities. They were extremely unpopular among

the ordinary conscript rank and file, on whom many of them affected to look down as inferior beings. The more unscrupulous of them would attempt to evade duty by bribing non-commissioned officers, while those who were unable to compass bribery railed against the unequal treatment meted out to them in comparison with that enjoyed by their comrades. Their one year of training was insufficient to make practical soldiers out of the raw material submitted, and altogether it was a good thing for France when the whole system was swept away, and, consistently with the Republican principle, all citizens were regarded as equal under the drill instructor. The *volontaire* system was no more and no less than favouritism on the part of the State.

It must not be overlooked that, although the initial period of service in the French Army is compulsory, quite a large percentage of the men remain in the Army of their own free will at the end of the two compulsory years. For such as elect to make a career of the Army in this fashion, there is a materially increased rate of pay, ranging from an approximate equivalent of 8s. a day upwards, with a pension, and usually with Government employment if desired, after only fifteen years of service. These *re-engagés* very seldom stay down in the ranks, but form the chief source

from which non-commissioned officers are obtained. Kipling's phrase with regard to British non-commissioned officers is equally applicable to the Army of the Republic, for the non-commissioned officer is the backbone of the French Army just as surely as the officer is its brains. The sergeant-major of a squadron, or the French equivalent of a British infantry colour-sergeant in a company, is the right hand of the captain commanding, adviser as well as intermediary between officers and men. The sergeant in charge of a *peloton* or troop is not only the principal instructor with whom the men of the troop have to deal, but is also counsellor and guide to the young lieutenant who comes straight from a military school to take up his commission, and needs experience of the ways of men in addition to the theoretical knowledge he has already gained. The corporal, who does not hold non-commissioned rank as in the British Army, and counts his position as an appointment rather than a definite promotion, forms a sort of go-between for men and sergeants, imparting individual instruction to the men, and supervising their welfare in the barrack room, while himself qualifying for the rank of sergeant. The revolutionary proposal to abolish corporals in the French Army rose out of an idea that men resented being governed by one

who had formerly been a comrade with them, but could no longer be so regarded after he had assumed authority over them. It is to be hoped that the proposal will never be acted on, for the principle of entrusting matters of individual tuition and supervision to the old soldiers takes no account of personal worth or fitness for command.

The life which the conscript must lead during his two years of service is determined largely by the garrison to which he is drafted. Life in a sunny and sleepy garrison town in the wine-growing district of the south is—granted reasonable military conditions—quite ideal; the monotony of the life spent in drill in a frontier fort tends to make the conscript bad-tempered, while men stationed among the French hills of the south and eastern frontiers gain most in the way of physical fitness, and also, in their work of making new roads, clearing passes, constructing frontier obstructions, ascertaining distances, and carrying the heavy loads incidental to their work from point to point, acquire a certain quality of mental celerity of which men stationed in the sunny garrison towns of the south go free. But the various attractions and drawbacks of the twenty great garrison towns, together with their situation and special characteristics, are sufficient to merit separate consideration.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT GARRISON TOWNS OF FRANCE

PARIS, as capital of the Republic, first merits consideration among the great garrison towns of France. It has the most extensive system of fortifications in the world, and has had the doubtful privilege of having undergone more sieges, burnings, and other military experiments than most large cities can boast or mourn. The inner line of fortifications was planned as far back as 1840, with a total measurement of $22\frac{1}{2}$ miles, but after the war of 1870 two main lines of detached forts were erected in addition to those already in existence, which formed the skeleton on which the more modern plan is built. The older forts are those of St. Denis, Aubervilliers, Romainville, Noisy, Resny, Nogent, Vincennes, Ivry, Bicêtre, Montrouge, Vanves, Issy, and Mont Valérien; the new forts which completed the scheme are those of Palaiseau, Villeras, Buc, and St. Cyr, which form the Versailles portion of the scheme, and Marly, St. Jamme,

and Aidremont, round St. Germain. On the opposite side of the Seine are situated forts Corneillers, Domont, Montlignon, Montmorency, Écouen, Stains, Vaujours, Villiers, and Villeneuve St. Georges. The Chatillon fort occupies a position between the two lines, and is placed on the site whence German batteries bombarded Paris during the siege of 1871, forming a proof of the wisdom displayed in the German choice of position. The double line of forts thus disposed renders Paris as nearly impregnable to the attack of an enemy as is possible under modern military conditions.

The total number of troops garrisoned in Paris in normal times is about 25,000, and there are also about 4500 *gendarmes*. Paris in itself ranks as a separate military district of the Republic, and is noteworthy as being the head-quarters of the Republican Guard, practically the only body of picked men in the French military system, and analogous with the Guards' Brigade of the British Army.

Amiens, the head-quarters of the 2nd Army Corps, is a city of nearly 100,000 inhabitants, containing a cathedral which is generally considered the finest existing example of Gothic architecture. Situated eighty-one miles north of Paris, it is one of the principal points of concentration for troops in the vicinity of the northern frontier, and forms

head-quarters for the departments of Aisne, Oise, Somme, and parts of Seine-et-Oise and Seine. Although head-quarters of an Army Corps, Amiens does not rank among the principal fortified posts of France.

Besançon, situated 243 miles south-east of Paris, ranks as a first-class fortress, and is the head-quarters of the 7th Army Corps. It is the centre of military administration for the departments of Ain, Doubs, Haute-Marne, Haute-Saône, Jura, Belfort, and part of Rhône. It is an ancient town containing Roman remains dating from the second century of the Christian era, including an amphitheatre and triumphal arch. Situated on the main line of rail from Dijon to Belfort, Besançon is one of the centres of mobilisation for the defence of the eastern frontier, and it is from this point that a good many of the first line of troops were drafted to the area of recent conflict in Alsace and Lorraine. In itself Besançon is a quiet and pleasant city on a peninsula stretching out from the left bank of the river Doubs, and it has a reputation as the principal watch-making centre of France.

Bordeaux, the metropolis of south-western France, is 360 miles distant from Paris by rail, and forms the head-quarters of the 18th Army Corps. As one of the finest cities of France, and a coastal

town, it is a popular station among the troops, and serves as head-quarters for the departments of Charente-Inférieure, Gironde, Landes, Basses-Pyrénées, and Hautes-Pyrénées. The military history of Bordeaux dates back to very ancient times, for it was sacked successively by Vandals, Visigoths, Franks, and Norsemen, and attained to a period of peace only at the middle of the twelfth century. As centre of one of the principal wine-growing districts of France, it is as near climatic perfection as the conscript can expect to get, though those who serve in the department of Hautes-Pyrénées undergo more rigorous conditions of weather. In addition to being a port of departure for trans-Atlantic traffic, Bordeaux is a popular pleasure resort, and thus plenty of amusements are within reach of the troops serving at head-quarters.

Bourges, the head-quarters of the 8th Army Corps, is one of the principal military stations of France, although not in itself a town of very great importance. Its training establishments rank very highly in the military life of the nation, including as they do a national cannon foundry, very extensive engineering works, and schools of artillery and pyrotechnics for the training of officers. Bourges is head-quarters for the departments of Cher, Côte-d'Or, Nièvre, Saône-et-Loire, and part

of the department of Rhône. It is one of the chief arsenals of the Republic, and occupies a position near the geographical centre of France. The town dates back to Roman time, and had the doubtful distinction of being destroyed by Julius Cæsar, at about the time of his invasion of Britain.

Châlons-sur-Marne has been a centre of conflict in most of the wars in which France has been engaged from very early times. It was destroyed by the Vandals, by Attila and his ruthless Huns, and by the Burgundians in mediæval times, and is situated on a plain which has always been considered an ideal battlefield, and has served that purpose throughout the centuries up to the present day. It is the head-quarters of the 6th Army Corps, and is the military centre for the departments of Ardennes, Aubes, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Marne, Meuse, and Vosges. It is 107 miles east of Paris by rail, and is one of the principal brewing centres of France, the wine trade in which it used to be engaged having gone northward to Rheims. In the scheme under which the French Army is constituted, Châlons is one of the centres for early mobilisation of troops of the first line with a view to the defence of the north-eastern frontier.

Clermont-Ferrand is head-quarters for the departments of Loire, Haute-Loire, Allier, Cantal,

Puy-de-Dôme, and part of the department of Rhône. It is the head-quarters of the 13th Army Corps, and is a town of about 55,000 inhabitants, situated 260 miles directly south of Paris by rail. It may be regarded as one of the first centres of systematic mobilisation of which France affords historical record, for at the end of the eleventh century Peter the Hermit preached the first Crusade in the church of Notre Dame at Clermont-Ferrand.

Grenoble, dominated by Mont Rachais, a hill rising nearly 3500 feet above sea-level, ranks as a first-class fortress, and is the military centre for the departments of Hautes-Alpes, Drôme, Isère, Savoie, Haute-Savoie, and part of the department of Rhône. It is the head-quarters of the 14th Army Corps, and is one of the most beautiful of French cities. In consequence of this it is a well patronised tourist centre, and as such is a popular station among the conscripts.

Le Mans, the military centre for the departments of Eure-et-Loire, Orne, Mayenne, Sarthe, and parts of the departments of Seine-et-Rise and Seine, is situated 131 miles W.S.W. from Paris by rail, and has historical associations with Richard Cœur de Lion and Henry II of England, having been the birthplace of the latter. It is the head-quarters of the 4th Army Corps, and has a popula-

tion of about 65,000, including the garrison of about 5500. It was a walled city of the Roman Empire in the third century, and has undergone sieges by the dozen from mediæval times onward. It was one of the centres of conflict in the interne-cine strife between Bendeau and Republican troops at the time of the Revolution, while in 1870 it was the scene of a French defeat. Its cathedral contains the tomb of an English queen, Lion-hearted Richard's consort, and the town is one of great historic interest.

Lille, the military centre for the departments of Nord and Pas-de-Calais, is the head-quarters of the 1st Army Corps, and is in the centre of one of the most thickly populated manufacturing districts of France. It is situated 153 miles north of Paris, and up to a few years ago ranked as a first-class fortress town, but, on account of its great commercial importance, and the manufacturing character of the district in which it is situated, it was decided that Lille should be regarded as an open town, and not subject to bombardment. The nature of the country in which Lille is situated and the density of population may be judged from the fact that it forms a military centre for two departments only, instead of for four or five, as in the case of other head-quarters garrison towns. The old fortifica-

tions of Lille have been converted into boulevards; under the old scheme of defence the works were so constructed that large areas in the vicinity of the citadel could be placed under water, in case of attack. As French cities go, Lille is comparatively modern, dating back only to A.D. 1030, when Count Baldwin IV walled in the village from which the present prosperous town of nearly 200,000 inhabitants has sprung.

Limoges, the military centre for the departments of Charente, Corrèze, Creuse, Dordogne, and Haute-Vienne, is situated about 250 miles S.S.W. of Paris by rail. It is the head-quarters of the 12th Army Corps, and even at the time of the Roman conquest was a place of importance, having contributed 10,000 men to the defence of Alesia against the Roman invasion. During the Hundred Years' War it sustained alternate sieges by French and English, and from the time of John of England to that of the Black Prince it was under threat to fire and sword, to which the Black Prince gave it up after taking the town by assault. Remains of a Roman fountain and amphitheatre still exist in the town, of which the present population is about 85,000.

Marseilles is the military centre for the departments of Basses-Alpes, Alpes-Maritimes, Corse,

Vaucluse, Bouches-du-Rhône, Gard, Var, and Ardèche. It is the head-quarters of the 15th Army Corps, and is a naval station as well. It has been a place of commercial importance from the earliest days, and, situated as it is in one of the healthiest districts of France, as well as being on the coast, it forms an ideal military station. In former times it was subject to epidemic diseases on account of the sub-tropical nature of the climate, but modern methods of sanitation have neutralised this drawback, and Marseilles is now as pleasant a place as any that a conscript can hope for in order to undergo his term of service. It is the principal port of France, and as such is strongly fortified, but its fortifications belong to the naval administration of the Republic. Historically, Marseilles dates back to the year 600 B.C., when the Greeks established a colony here. It passed to Roman rule at the time of the invasion of Gaul and became connected with, among other notable Romans, Petronius, the arbiter of elegance at Nero's court. Throughout the Middle Ages Marseilles enjoyed a semi-independence, and it has always played a prominent part in the history of the Mediterranean sea-board.

Montpellier, the head-quarters of the 16th Army Corps, is the military centre for the departments of Aude, Aveyron, Hérault, Lozère, Tarn, and

Pyrénées-Orientales. It is about 480 miles south of Paris, and about seven miles distant from the Mediterranean, from which it is divided by the lagoons of Perols and l'Arnel. The town is of comparatively late formation as towns go in France, having become a place of note only in the eighth century. It is a wine and brandy centre, and is also engaged in silk works, and, owing to its situation, enjoys a congenial climate. The population is upwards of 80,000.

Nantes, the head-quarters of the 11th Army Corps, is known as the most populous town of Brittany, and is the military centre for the departments of Finistère, Loire-Inférieure, Morbihan, and Vendée. It is situated about 27 miles from the sea and about 250 miles from Paris by rail. The population is about 140,000, and from an historical point of view Nantes is one of the most interesting of French cities. Its name is derived from its having been the chief city of the Nannetes, an ancient Gallic tribe, and under the Romans the city became one of the principal centres of Western Gaul, having retained its prominence up to the present day. It has seen many sieges and assaults, and was the last city of France to surrender to Henry IV of France, who signed here the famous edict that gave Protestants equal rights with Cath-

olics for nearly a hundred years. Many notable Frenchmen owned Nantes as their birthplace, among them Jules Verne and several famous French generals. Unto the present day the Bretons of Nantes and the surrounding district retain their distinct peculiarities of character, forming for France what East Anglia forms for England, and Norman influence, combined with Celtic origin, is evident in the people of the country. The Breton, by the way, makes a fine soldier, having more of doggedness than the usual Frenchman to combine with the dash and agility of body and mind characteristic of the Latin races.

Orleans, the head-quarters of the 5th Army Corps, is the military centre for the departments of Loiret, Loire-et-Cher, Seine-et-Marne, Yonne, part of Seine-et-Oise and part of Seine. It is situated 75 miles south-west of Paris by rail, and has a population of about 60,000, including its garrison. As the capital of a separate kingdom, Orleans enjoyed great prominence throughout the Middle Ages, and it is always remembered for its associations with the soldier-maid of France, Jeanne d'Arc. One of the principal artillery schools of the Army is situated here. An ancient Celtic centre, the town was renamed in the period of Roman occupation, and was a flourishing city as

early as the fifth century. It was vainly besieged by Attila and the Huns, taken by Clovis, and held against the English at the time when Jeanne brought reinforcements to the garrison and compelled the raising of the siege. The long wars between Huguenots and Catholics brought more strife to Orleans, and in the revolutionary period it suffered severely, while it was occupied by the Prussians both in 1815 and in 1870, numerous battles being fought in its vicinity during the last-mentioned war. It is worthy of note that a Duke of Orleans, a member of the old royal family of France, served in the British Army in the reign of Victoria.

Rennes, the ancient capital of Brittany, is the head-quarters of the 10th Army Corps, and the site of a large arsenal in addition to the barracks, while it is the military centre for the departments of Côtes-du-Nord, Manche, and Ille-et-Vilaine. In the early part of the eighteenth century the town was almost destroyed by fire, a catastrophe that is not even yet forgotten; while as the birthplace of Boulanger, who introduced many reforms into the French Army and was largely responsible for its efficiency in recent years, Rennes is peculiarly connected with military matters. It may be remembered, by the way, that the second Dreyfus trial was held here in 1899. The population of

the town is about 75,000, and it is 51 miles south-east of St. Malo and 232 miles west-south-west of Paris. Historically, Rennes was the centre of several Roman roads which are still recognisable, and in mediæval times it suffered greatly from the wars between French and English. In the revolutionary period the Republican Army made Rennes their centre for the operations against the Vendéans, but it has no later prominence in connection with military history.

Rouen, 87 miles north-west of Paris by rail, is the head-quarters of the 3rd Army Corps, is the ancient capital of Normandy, and military centre for the departments of Calvados, Eure, Seine-Inférieure, and parts of Seine-et-Oise and of Seine. It has a population of about 120,000, including the garrison, and is a town of narrow, picturesque streets and of old-world dignity and interest. Here William the Conqueror died and Jeanne d'Arc was burned—a statue commemorates the latter event in the town. Although 78 miles from the sea, Rouen is one of the principal French ports, the bed of the Seine having been deepened from the sea to the city by an ingenious system of embankments, which forced the river to deepen its own bed rather than extend its width—and military labour went far toward the construction of the embankments.

Toulouse, the head-quarters of the 17th Army Corps, is the military centre for the departments of Ariège, Haute-Garonne, Gers, Lot, Lot-et-Garonne, and Tarn-et-Garonne. The town is peculiarly liable to great floods, and those of 1855, which swept away the suspension bridge of St. Pierre, and of 1875, which destroyed 7000 houses and drowned 300 people, are still remembered in the city. It is situated 478 miles south of Paris and 160 miles south-east from Bordeaux, and, with a population of about 150,000, ranks as the metropolis of Southern France.

Tours, the head-quarters of the 9th Army Corps, is situated 145 miles south-west from Paris by rail, and is the military centre for the departments of Maine-et-Loire, Indre-et-Loire, Deux-Sèvres, and Vienne. Under the Gauls it was the capital of the Turones, from whom it derived the name which it still bears, and traces of Roman occupation still remain in the form of the ancient amphitheatre. After the fall of Roman power, Tours was fortified against barbarian invasion, and subsequently it was closely connected with the great names of French history, notably those of Clovis, who presented rich gifts to the church at Tours out of the spoils won from Alaric and the Goths, and with Charlemagne, who disciplined its monasteries.

Few towns surpass Tours in historic interest, and it is noteworthy in modern times, as the birthplace of Balzac and the two Marshals Boucicaut. In 1870 the government of the national defence was established at Tours, and the Third Republic may thus be said to have had its birth here.

No list of the great garrisons of France would be complete without a reference to Verdun and Toul, the ends of the great chain of fortresses which defend the eastern frontier. Toul, 14 miles to the west of Nancy, is the centre of a vast network of entrenchments and defences, and the hills surrounding the town are crowned with forts which command all the country within range to the east. A series of forts, echeloning along the ridge of the Meuse, connect Toul with Verdun, and forms a defensive line which is only equalled in strength by the defences of Paris, as far as the French military defensive system is concerned. Verdun, at the northern end of the line of frontier defences, is surrounded by a ring of detached forts, eleven in number, and occupying a circumference of 25 miles. Since the loss of Metz to Germany, Verdun has been so strengthened as to form the most formidable fortress in France.

CHAPTER XIV

SOME EFFECTS. ACTIVE SERVICE

ONE of the principal effects of a conscript system such as that of France is that the great majority of the population of the country is characterised by fixed habits and ideas with regard to the way in which work should be done. The Latin races are all marked by a certain flexibility and dexterity of mind, a quickness of apprehension which is absent, for the most part, from other Caucasian stock, and military training increases this and applies it to physical use as well as to mental qualities. The conscript, back in civilian life at the end of his training, is to be compared to the sailor of the British Navy in many respects; he has learned a certain handiness, a dexterity in connection with his daily work, and it is a lesson that stays with him, as a rule, to the end of his life.

While military service alters, it does not create; the stolid Breton—stolid by comparison with the men of central and Southern France, remains stolid as before he went up for training, for the Army

has grafted on him nothing that is new—it has merely added to his knowledge and developed, in the way of characteristics, what was already there. But the Breton is the better for his two years—without them he would be a very stolid and unimaginative person indeed, and he has learned to stir himself, to make the best of himself and the work that is his to perform. Similarly the traditional Frenchman, coming from the wine-growing districts of the south, and a hot-headed and impetuous individual, has his eccentricities modified, for hot-headedness does not pay in military service, and this man has learned to control himself just as the Breton has acquired a little more rapidity of movement. Yet the individual characteristics of the two types remain; personal traits have been modified by discipline, but not destroyed, for while the Army of the Republic creates nothing, it also annihilates nothing. The men have been moulded to a pattern, but they are the same men in essence, with no quality removed altogether. Usually, they are vastly improved.

Especially is this last true of the many youths who think—it is a common failing of youth—that they know everything and are capable of all things. The Army modifies their self-conceit; it teaches them that they are but as other men, needing to

learn. It first of all destroys the unhealthy growth of unjustifiable self-confidence, reducing these men to utter self-abasement; then, on this foundation, the Army and the training it involves gradually build up, not a belief in self-powers, but a knowledge of the capacities and powers of self, of their limitations as well as their extent. The braggart who goes to his military training comes back chastened and, if he still boasts, it is of things that he is really capable of doing, knowledge that he has actually obtained—he makes no claims that he cannot justify, as a rule. This much the Army of France does for the men who pass through it and back to their normal tasks in life.

The life of the conscripts has been charged with blunting the finer sensibilities of those who have to undergo its rigours, but the charge cannot be allowed. For one might as well say that the engineer is rendered incapable of appreciating music, or the doctor has no conception of the beauty of a garden, by reason of the mathematical nature of the work accomplished by the one and the physical repulsiveness of much that the other has to perform. The Army and the training that it involves never injured a Frenchman yet, so long as the laws governing the Army received proper interpretation. In the end of the last century there were injustices

prevalent both among men and officers, but the world and France gain wisdom with experience; the Republican Army as at present constituted is a growth of only forty years, and its predecessor, the Army of Napoleon the futile, showed by the war of 1870 what an immense amount of reform was necessary before French arms could regain their lustre. In the history of an army, forty years is a very short time, and, rather than cavil at the slowness with which reforms have been accomplished, it is due to France that one should admire the way in which the Army has been built up from so sorry a foundation into the great and effective machine of to-day.

In civilian France, military ways persist. Habits of neatness and method, and accuracy in trifles, attest the military training that men have undergone. The very step of a Frenchman walking is reminiscent of the days when he was taught to march, and he has a respect for and knowledge of firearms which the average civilian of English life—unless he be addicted to some form of sport—never acquires. The Frenchman is never at a loss with a sporting gun, knows better than to point the weapon at the head of another man when loading, and in other ways betrays familiarity with the tool of a craft—one that many Englishmen

regard as something to be handled carelessly or passed by as a thing of mystery. This is given only as an instance of the many ways in which the conscript system modifies men, for there are many ways in which modifications are effected. Some students of the subject question whether the French flexuousness and adaptability are results of the military system of the Republic or whether they are ingrained in the race independently of military training. Since practically every citizen is a soldier, this is a point that cannot be easily determined, but there can be no doubt that the characteristics in question are increased by military service.

Every Frenchman who has passed through the Army is in possession of a little book which he guards most jealously, since in that book are inserted full particulars of his term of service with the colours, and all things relating to his military history, as well as details of his duties in case of mobilisation of the Army. The little book of the ex-conscript is to him what "marriage lines" are to a woman—except that the ex-conscript incurs penalties if he loses his book, while the woman who loses her "marriage lines" can always get another copy as long as the register containing particulars of the ceremony is in existence.

It must be understood that, in case of need

arising for the mobilisation of the Army, the body of men brought to the colours is so great that some system must be followed in bringing them on to a war footing. The little book contains particulars of the place at which the conscript on the reserve is to report himself, together with the day of mobilisation on which he will be required to join the colours—the actual mobilisation is spread over a period of days, in order that some men—the first line troops—may be drafted out to their posts before the rest come in. When the order for mobilisation has been given out—by the ringing of bells, proclamation by criers, and in various other ways—the reservist immediately consults his little book, and ascertains on what date he will have to present himself to the authorities, and at what station he is expected to rejoin. His wife or his mother or sister cooks him food for the day of his going, and, after a prayer at some wayside shrine or in some sanctuary, and perhaps an offering vowed to the Virgin or to the patron saint, the citizen sets out to become a soldier again. August, 1914, was the first time of complete mobilisation in the history of the Third Republic, and the system under which the men were gathered back to the colours worked smoothly in all its details. There was no confusion anywhere; to each man his place, to each unit its

place, and the Army Corps went out to the Belgian frontier or to the edge of the provinces that slope down toward the Rhine, with ominous celerity, and with those interminable regimental songs sounding as they sound when men go out to manœuvres at the end of the soldiers' year. The hour for which this Army had been prepared had come, and the Army was found ready to meet the hour.

Although the effective strength of the French Army, when the last man has been armed and placed in the field, is about 4,800,000 men, it must not be supposed that the Republic maintains all these numbers as a fighting force in the field throughout the campaign. About a million and a half of men go out as the "first line," and from those who remain this line is strengthened as and where required. It has become clear since the battle of the Marne that almost a second army was collected under the shelter of the Paris forts to reinforce the retreating line of men who fell back from the Belgian frontier, and in this connection it may be noted that the traditional French method of conducting war is with sixty per cent of the men in the firing line, and the remaining forty per cent in rear as reserves. France's conduct of the war against Germany has shown that this method of fighting—diametrically opposed to the German con-

ception of war—is still being adhered to, and the troops in the firing line by no means compose the whole of the French striking force.

As to active service in the French Army, the general English view is that the French soldier, with the exception of the Algerian garrison, sees no service outside European bounds, and the deeds of French soldiers are ignored as regards French colonial possessions and expeditions. In the expedition to Tonquin, to which reference has already been made in connection with the Foreign Legion of the French Army, there were deeds done by individuals and by regiments that are worthy of memory besides the brilliant exploits of our own Army. It is not only to the war in the Crimea and the present campaign that we must look for evidence of the indomitable courage that the French undoubtedly possess, but also to service on the French colonial battlefields, in Chinese swamps and African wilds.

The present campaign has proved that French soldiers are capable of retreating in good order when strategy renders a retreat necessary—a feat hitherto deemed impossible to the army whose sole strength was supposed to consist in its power of impetuous attack. The retreat from the Belgian frontier has rendered necessary a reconstruction of

ideas as regards French psychology, and has shown that the training imposed on the conscripts of France in time of peace was the best that could be applied. Just as in the field the best general is the best psychologist, so in time of peace the best administration is that which, regardless of criticism of its methods, prepares its men most effectively for war, selecting the form of training to be applied in a way that takes into consideration the mental characteristics and temperament of the material required to be trained. The merits of the form of training selected can only be determined by the effectiveness of the trained material in action, and, granting these things, the conduct of the French Army in the present campaign is a splendid vindication of the peace training of that Army. The first stages of the war have been all against the French way of fighting—the way in which the French soldier is supposed to exhibit himself at his best; yet in retreat, and in action approximating in length and tedium to the monotony and continued exertion of siege warfare, the French soldier has given his commanders cause for pride.

Let it be remembered that the men who are fighting the battles of France, and of all civilisation, on French soil in these closing months of 1914 are

not like the veterans with whom Napoleon won his battles. The wars of the Napoleonic era, lasting for years as they did, brought into the field a host of trained men—trained in war by the practice of war, rather than by experiments under peace conditions; from the time of the Revolution onward there were sufficient veteran soldiers, seasoned in real warfare, to stiffen the ranks of any army that might be raised to attack—neither to retreat nor to defend, but to attack in accordance with French tradition. The Army of the Republic to-day is made up of men who have had two years' training apiece (with the exception of the small percentage of *re-engagés*, who also have had no war service) under peace conditions, and who for the most part have never seen a shot fired in anger, as the phrase goes. Yet out of this semi-raw material (semi-raw as far as war experience goes) France has raised an Army which may without exaggeration be termed magnificent, an Army that has kept the field under harder circumstances than those which brought about the surrender of Sedan, an Army that no more knows when it is beaten than does the British force fighting by its side.

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